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'Herman Melville and the Mid-Nineteenth-Century: The Narrator and the Literary Politics of Class Dissent in the First Six Novels.'

N.A.Chamberlain, St.Chad's College, Doctor of Philosophy. 1990.

Abstract

Introduction: Mid-nineteenth-century America was class-governed; the dominant elite used rhetoric and literature to impose on other citizens its sectarian 'idea of America'.

In *Typee* and *Omoo* Melville developed a structure that intimated his dissent from elitist enterprises such as Pacific imperialism. A narrator, representative of the elite, becomes the object for satire; the text becomes a ground for political and rhetorical struggle. Melville sets 'tests' for the audience: consumption, collusion or opposition?

In *Mardi*, radical subversion of the narrator replaces delineation of attitudes, spurred by the 1848 European revolutions. As the narrator is decentred, reading becomes progressively disconcerting.

In *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* the previous allusive style is resumed, though the narrators are again undercut. *Redburn* exposes the dehumanisation caused by capitalist trade. *White-Jacket* demonstrates the class-bias of apparently anodyne stories.

*Moby-Dick* thus delivers 'judgment' on Western society, symbolised now by the whaling industry. The text reveals the narrator's knowing repression of the effects of industrialisation and imperialism.

Throughout, Melville's novels are seen as the prime evidence for his class-dissent. He used the reading process to encourage sensitivity to the elite's rhetorical shaping of reality. When we read his books, we read first the narrator's typical narratives; then, if we follow Melville's hints, we may discern his oppositional text beneath. This subversive technique gained Melville his initial audience and also prevented immediate censure. The representative narrator is thus his key device. The narrators delimit and propagandise class-attitudes. Yet when satirised, because of their bond with the audience, they are Melville's means of engendering reform.

The thesis thoroughly considers the tradition of Melville scholarship. Appendices illustrate the conventional genres which the narrators manipulate, and which Melville then scrutinises.

For Mum, Dad, Tim, Richard, Pam,  
and all who have helped me.



### Abbreviations

The Notes and Bibliography are produced in accordance with the *MHRA Style Book*, edited by A.S.Maney and R.G.Smallwood (London, 1978). The Melville edition I have used is that published by Cambridge University Press in three volumes (Cambridge, 1982, 1983, 1984). This reproduces the text of the standard Northwestern-Newberry Edition; but is more widely available in the United Kingdom than the American version. For convenience, I have abbreviated the titles of the novels as follows:

*Typee* - *T*,      *Omoo* - *O*,      *Mardi* - *M*,      *Redburn* - *R*,  
*White-Jacket* - *W-J*,      *Moby-Dick* - *M-D*.

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## Preface: Critical Perspectives

In recent years, drawing on the painstaking biographical research of people such as Charles Anderson and Leon Howard, a number of critics have grappled with the problem of restoring Melville's work to its context. T. Walter Herbert has commented on the relationship between missionary narratives, contemporary American self-conception and the early novels, especially *Typee*.<sup>1</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch and Donald Pease have explored the links between *Moby-Dick* and American concepts such as the 'jeremiad' and other rhetorical forms.<sup>2</sup> James Duban and Robert Clark have sought to discover the novels' use of contemporary political and religious rhetoric.<sup>3</sup> Marvyn Fisher has explored Melville's social vision on the evidence of the short stories.<sup>4</sup> All of these commentators recognise the way that Melville incorporated the ideas, forms, and rhetoric of his time into his texts, and all of them argue that within this contemporary framework, he was trying to say something of value to his readers.

In a sense, therefore, the critics named above are picking up the gauntlet of the New Critics, who dominated American letters for so many years: in staying within the formalist preserve but claiming that the actual prose of Melville's novels is not 'purely' artistic, they are challenging the New Critical dislocation of the texts from the society which sponsored them. By analysing the way that Melville 'anchored' his books in history, they hope to gain a better understanding of his concerns and motivations.

This work of reclamation has been given new impetus by the advent of post-structuralism (which can, equally, deny the relationship between text and society, by destroying the possibility of statements to 'mean'

anything at all), and of the increase of interest in narrative discourse. It is in this new debate that I situate myself, for while the political and materialist critics listed above have obviously tacitly engaged with the post-structuralists, I feel that a more explicit discussion of their claims for Melville must be undertaken. Their 'disembodied' understanding of rhetoric must be considered, and refuted. This is not to decry the insights of people such as Harold Beaver and W.B.Dillingham, but to recognise that their eventual dissolution of Melville's novels into rhetorical whirlpools denies the intrinsic historicity of the texts and thereby causes as much harm as the 'myth-critics' and 'romance theorists' of years gone by.<sup>5</sup>

On the contrary, this is to take seriously the many incisive aspects of post-structuralist thought, especially when combined with historical analysis. Post-structuralist arguments cannot simply be dismissed by amassing ever more detail about Melville's life, his sources, and the incidents which helped form his books. These are vital occupations, but they must be incorporated within an awareness of textual processes that through inquiry into post-structuralist exegetics questions these theorists' rather depressing assertions about the capabilities of literature. This is what I have tried to begin in this thesis. Fundamental to my argument is the belief that it is the rhetoric of the books themselves which is political in content, and that it is at the level of rhetoric that the books' primary struggle occurs. Accepting the post-structuralist engagement with the processes of language, I have therefore sought to show that analysis of words is actually analysis of politics, and so that the books do actually 'mean' something. - In fact, that they can be used as I believe they were intended to be used by Melville; as a way to



engender social criticism. Melville did not write simply for pleasure, or for money, but out of a genuine disagreement with the premises of the world in which he lived, and with a concern to challenge, if not to change, that world.<sup>6</sup> My engagement with the arguments and terms of modern critical theory will be apparent throughout the thesis, but I have explicitly referred to them only when I felt such a reference would be of value to the reader.

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After the Introduction, which establishes the historical and literary context in which Melville wrote, six chapters discuss the novels from *Typee* to *Moby-Dick* in chronological order. The thesis concludes with a brief afterword about Melville's later works. There are three Appendices. The first contains a series of diagrams intended to illustrate some of the points I make about Melville's textual structures. The second and third outline two of the popular literary genres which Melville utilised: South Seas Travels, and Sea Stories.

## INTRODUCTION

'God bless our star-gemmed banner,  
shake its folds out to the breeze.'

Patriotic song



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Part One: Determining Context; Mid-century America

Despite the work of recent historians, the popular image of the mid-nineteenth-century U.S.A. is still that of a mass democracy. It was Alexis de Tocqueville who first promulgated this idea. Intrigued by widespread participation in the electoral process, he took this to indicate equality of opportunity. He saw a society in which the rigid European divisions of class and wealth had seemingly been abolished, where all could apparently prosper or fail, according to their talents: 'nothing struck me more forcibly than the equality of condition among the people'.

But as, for example, Edward Pessen remarks, de Tocqueville was only reiterating an argument to which Americans had long been subjected: 'It not only told Americans what they wanted to hear; it told them what they had little difficulty convincing themselves was the actual case'. - De Tocqueville's study seemed to corroborate the assertion that progressive reforms had transformed an eighteenth-century libertarian state into the world's first democracy of opportunity: "We are all too rich, that is the danger our simple republicans have to contend with".<sup>2</sup> - But was this actually the correct picture?

Although de Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America* for an educated European audience, its democratic emphasis was obviously acceptable to U.S. social leaders. In great contrast to Dickens or Mrs Trollope, it told a story of progress and change that lent support to their claims. Yet in doing this, it simply projected back on to American society a history which obscured reality. Despite political changes since the early republican era, effective power was still concentrated in the hands of a small 'elite', so negating any advertised 'advances'. The 1830s-50s were remarkable not for

democratic progress, but for the gradual consolidation of wealth and influence in the hands of those people with a significant stake in society, whether in terms of property, family or education. Moreover, they were also remarkable for the elite's apparent ability to disguise this fact. In this introduction, I shall consider both of these features, before exploring their significance for the period's literature.<sup>3</sup>

### 1) The Fact of Dispossession

In the U.S.A. there was both an untitled landed aristocracy, and an aristocracy of wealth. These transcended party-political and geographical boundaries, and exercised pervasive control over all aspects of American life. Their position seemed impregnable.

Consider property. Most of the people actually became poorer as the century progressed; only those who already had social substance became richer:

In the great cities of the northeast, the top 1 percent of wealthholders [sic,] owned about one fourth of the wealth in the mid-1820's and about half the property by midcentury -- In the small borough of Stonington, Connecticut, for example, where in 1831 more than half the householders owned some property, no matter how modest the amount, by 1851 less than one third of them continued to do so, (Pessen p.81)

Consider also living standards. As Horace Greeley, the editor of the *New York Tribune* said, in 1845 most of New York: 'embracing at least two thirds of our population' lived on a 'pittance -- scarcely \$1 per week for each person subsisting thereon' (quoted Pessen p.85).

Even that alleged characteristic of U.S. society, social mobility, was more chimera than fact:

Detailed information on about three fourths of the interurban rich reveals that the overwhelming majority of wealthy persons - slightly more than 90 percent - were descended of parents and families who combined affluence with high social

status. Only about 2 percent of the urban socioeconomic elite were born poor, with the remaining 6 or 7 percent born into families of middling status. (Pessen p.86)

While in ultimate terms, there may have been greater possibility of social mobility than in Europe, to exploit such 'freedom', financial backing was invariably needed.

Despite the picture suggested by popular fictions of the frontier, life for most citizens, rural and urban, in the U.S. model democracy was marked by progressive industrialisation, broken strikes, and abortive attempts to create labour movements, by a working-class becoming tied to factories for employment, and being paid in tokens that could only be exchanged in factory-owned shops. The reality was of a nation committed to economic and territorial imperialism, to the reduction of men to slavery and to the controlled genocide of the indigenous population. In social terms, at least, claims that "overwhelming numbers ... the bone and sinew of the country [owned] the great mass of our national wealth" (A.Jackson, quoted Pessen p.79) only obscure the fact of dispossession.<sup>4</sup>

#### 11) Political reform

Here, too, scepticism is required. Did the greatly extended franchise and mushrooming number of elections ensure the participation of most of the electorate in democratic processes, or was their vote only required to 'rubber-stamp' party candidates over whom they had no control?

In most elections, especially presidential ones, the choice was between either Whigs or Democrats, and as Michael Heale shows, the

campaigns became great theatrical spectacles to convince the voters that there were real 'differences' between the parties.<sup>6</sup> Yet, although differences certainly existed, they were largely 'non-ideological'; neither party sought to challenge the fundamental U.S. political settlement. Indeed, both accepted as a basic tenet, the need to proclaim their loyalty to the 'truths' of the Revolution. Heale's analysis of contemporary documents reveals the certainty with which nineteenth-century politicians knew that even if power switched from one party to the other, it would still remain in the hands of men drawn from the same social class:

"What a sublime spectacle ... Millions of men rushing to the polls under the full impression that the weal or woe of the nation was hanging as it were upon their individual act ..." (quoted Heale p.216)

Even at local level, office-holders were invariably men of the elite.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, although the political high ground was dominated by the Whigs and Democrats, the scions of the Founding Fathers, the period also saw attempts to break their hegemony by establishing new parties.

A good example of such efforts is the Working Men's Party, whose original Philadelphia branch sought to: 'nominate as candidates for public office such individuals as shall pledge themselves ... to support and advance ... the interests and enlightenment of the working classes' (quoted Pessen p.270). Thomas Skidmore, an early New York leader, shared these radical aims: 'hereditary wealth ... the prime source of all our calamities'.<sup>7</sup>

It must be stressed how much movements like this showed dissent from the liberal premises of the American state, as represented in the Whigs and Democrats:

The new party was a form of rejection by its members of both the Jacksonians and their major opponents. The Working Men stood for programs and called for changes in American society not dreamed of by the pragmatists at the helms of



the major parties. (Pessen p.271)

Moreover, although the Working Men were 'bought off' by the major parties, so ensuring the collapse of the movement, subsequent labour groups who also organised themselves politically did all they could to avoid a similar fate. For instance, in 1836 a Convention of Mechanics, Farmers and Working Men met at Utica N.Y. In an editorial, the *Albany Microscope* urged the convention to beware the dangers inherent in founding a heterodox party: 'Remember the regretted fate of the working-men - they were soon destroyed by hitching teams and rolling with parties ... They became perverted, and were unconsciously drawn into a vortex from which they never escaped' (*Albany Microscope* quoted Zinn p.219). This comment shows the extent to which new parties with radical platforms attracted support and commitment, as they tried to challenge the elitist Democrat/Whig hegemony. Nevertheless, the original convention movement (perhaps 27,000 strong), almost as soon as it had founded its Equal Rights Party, was encumbered with traditional labels, and forced to split.<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, therefore, despite continual attempts to break the political mould, power was retained by the two major parties until the Civil War; and this was an accurate reflection of the wealth and social dominance of their members. Even when members of the mainstream parties chose to confront topics such as slavery, race and industrialisation openly, the respective party machinery ensured that come election time compromise candidates were inevitably picked, with the result that any possible action was subverted.<sup>9</sup>

An Anti-Slavery man per se cannot be elected; but a Tariff, River-and-Harbor, Pacific Railroad, Free Homestead man, may succeed although he is Anti-Slavery.<sup>10</sup>

This 'broad front' approach meant that real reform was impossible;

dissent did occur in the mainstream, but it was rendered impotent. For most of the period, the politicians' chief objective was to maintain the fabric of the Second Party System, and so the status quo under which they and their class prospered. This was done by both appeasing certain demands, and by representing labour organisations and other non-conformist groups as subversive of the social order:

'In this favored land of law and liberty, the road to advancement is open to all ... Every American knows that or ought to know that he has no better friend than the laws and that he needs no artificial combination for his protection. They are of foreign origin and I am led to believe mainly upheld by foreigners.'  
(Judge Edwards of New York, quoted Zinn p.218)

As Heale says, 'one way of reconciling conflict with order, some Americans now perceived, was through the device of party'.<sup>11</sup> The popular picture of democratic political reform should be questioned as much as claims of social progress.

#### 111) The 'Idea of America'

If the U.S. was originally conceived as a libertarian society of property owners, not an egalitarian, mass-participation democracy, then as the comments above indicate, this was what it remained, despite institutional changes and suffrage extensions.<sup>12</sup> The Tocquevillian story of democratic progress only persists because the social leaders were able to disguise the realities of their rule, which they did by manipulating the 'idea of America' (or more exactly, the 'idea of the United States'). This is the complex of values first given institutional shape in the state created by the Founding Fathers, but which remained potent throughout the period, even when that state itself had apparently been reshaped. Its effect is of fundamental importance.

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Of the three core features of this 'idea', the first is the most easily grasped. This is, that the basic American 'right' is to liberty, and that liberty cannot be assessed in social terms. All Americans, except slaves and Indians, were born free, but their freedom was 'absolute', and entailed no commitment to their fellows beyond the mutual recognition of liberty.<sup>13</sup> This was the attitude which made the U.S.A. so receptive to capitalism, and which allowed Indians and Afro-Americans to be treated as goods and chattels; any concept of social interdependence such as the tribe, or the trades union, was in itself deemed to be anti-libertarian, and so un-American. This belief was the basis for the equal rights demands of the Southern states as they sought to extend their territory in the 1840s, and for the Fugitive Slave Law. Under this 1850 law, a free state was constitutionally compelled to return a renegade slave, and not to grant emancipation - to free the slave would be to infringe the 'liberty' of the slave's owner. It is interesting to note that Melville's father-in-law, Judge Lemuel Shaw, presided over the first test-application of the law in Massachusetts, and despite a public demonstration, upheld its provisions.<sup>14</sup>

The second feature of the 'idea of America', was that the ideal state was said to have been achieved already by the U.S.A., following the Revolutionary War. As Rush Welter shows, this meant that although the nation still had a 'mission', it was to maintain untarnished those great achievements, and to promulgate them throughout the continent and world at large, not to challenge the domestic settlement. This concept of mission thus established the dangerous precept that all U.S. 'reforms' were actually bound to be retrospective, for they had to be judged on their coherence with the spirit of the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution. It also resulted in a cult of U.S. supremacy instilled in its citizens from

birth, and that led to such aggressive stances as Manifest Destiny.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the third feature of the 'American idea' was that once established, the institutions of the state were deemed to be 'above politics'. While it was alleged that evil men could pervert the system of checks and balances by which the nation was governed, those institutions themselves were said to be exemplary, and beyond reform:

"I ask the gentleman if every American citizen does not obey the higher law of God when he obeys every part of the Constitution? ... Is not the spirit of the Constitution in accordance with the higher law? Can you point to a clause in the Constitution which, when fulfilling to the best of my ability, would make me violate the higher law of God?"<sup>16</sup>

The political rhetoric suggests that the state's institutions were inalienable - a useful fiction which disguises their class-inspired origins in the social elite whose forbears had originally framed the state.

To analyse contemporary rhetoric is thus to strip not only the hidden political settlement bare, but also to expose the parallel motivations behind many of the architectural, scientific and artistic achievements of the age. Clive Bush, for example, shows that these were characteristically developed in accordance with the elite's wish to create 'arts of peace', and 'arts of war' that would define the U.S.A. as the perfect society, and that would obscure the way in which the elite itself persistently manipulated the 'idea of America' to ensure its own comfort and power. He demonstrates the active way in which they set about their task: 'from pure science to technology, from painting to poetry, the need [was] to define a new space and a new time theoretically and politically'.<sup>17</sup>

This strategem was clearly assisted by the fact that America had always been a 'storied land', the site of European fantasy, and so ripe for





James Barry's *The Phoenix or the Resurrection of Freedom* (1776)



class-inspired mystification. In this period, the process can be seen very clearly in the architecture, whereby the great classical buildings of the new capital could be proposed as embodying eternal verities. Visual art also exploited the latent opportunities; as the famous print (facing) shows, it was commonplace to depict the United States as an ordered republic set against a realm of strife (again, note the architectural symbolism). Even though this artist was foreign, such impressions would be potent weapons.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, although literature's contribution to the process of mystification will be discussed in a later section, the great popularity of supposedly 'inert' classical forms such as the essay and the history is also instructive.<sup>20</sup> *The Federalist Papers* of Hamilton, Madison and Jay, for instance, despite their popularity, were also class-motivated tracts, arguing for 'a unity of commercial, as well as political, interests [that] can only result from a unity of government'.<sup>20</sup> Similarly instructive is George Bancroft's *History of the United States*. Although it offered a vision of U.S. progress, the vision that it projected was the New England aristocracy's; its powerful rhetoric concealed that this was not a vision for all. Bancroft said of the 'Mayflower Compact', 'humanity [here] recovered its rights, and instituted government on the basis of "equal laws" for "the general good,"' - he took this as the origin of the U.S. polity and elaborated his history from there. As S.E. Morison comments, this is a 'fancy' to which 'few today would subscribe'.<sup>21</sup>

And yet, it is easily possible to see the political motivation behind these seemingly neutral projects. The great facades of the buildings only serve to conceal servants' staircases. The symbolic and narrative art says nothing about the life of the majority of the population. The confident assertions of the literature can be undercut by researching the authors'

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class-affiliations. As both Bush and Hugh Honour show, for those willing to challenge apparent 'realities', the enterprise can be seen to have inevitably encoded traces of its own motivation: 'the triumphant sense of light over darkness only serves to underwrite the threatening sense of opposing forces'.<sup>22</sup>

The 'idea of America' was, then, a class-inspired concept, not a universally shared one, and it was designed to mystify the nature of the elite's rule. Allowing no place in the ideal Union to working-men, women, or racial minorities, the intention was to suggest that the U.S.A. was some kind of paradise in which dissent was sporadic and unnecessary. By attending, however, to the suppressed voices, it is possible to expose the partisan nature of the American idea. Concrete opposition movements did exist, and the elite's strategy is penetrable.<sup>23</sup>

#### iv) Rhetoric: The Idea of America in Language

One feature of the 'idea of America' that demonstrates its elitist motivation more clearly than most is rhetoric. In countless occasions for oratorical display and in a flood of documents from the Constitution on, the elite secured its social and political hegemony. A distinctive training produced a distinctive and subtle style, that like the contemporary architecture initially appears to disguise its class-inspiration.

The elite wielded rhetoric as a political implement during the Revolution. The clergy, with a long tradition of social prominence, arrogated to themselves apparent radicalism. A recent critic says that in

the pulpit: 'the minister himself "embodied and expressed" the leading ideas of the culture'. This comment overlooks the extent to which these educated functionaries used their opportunities to impose their partisan ideas on society, but it is an apt insight into their strategy: 'Clearly ... the sermon's agent carved out a political space during delivery'.<sup>24</sup> Although the clergy were relegated behind politicians as primary opinion-formers in the new republic, their role remained hugely significant.

Language, then, was always a key element in politics, both as object and as instrument. Debate about language as object can be seen in the calls to establish an American Academy, made in congress by John Adams. He said: 'It is not to be disputed that the form of government has an influence upon language, and language in turn its influences not only on the form of government, but the temper, the sentiments, the manners of the people' - it was therefore necessary to establish the Academy 'to oversee the language'.<sup>25</sup> The aims of such a body were more clearly apparent in the Philological Society, which in a 1788 pageant to celebrate the Federal Constitution, paraded a book through New York inscribed '*Federal Language*'. This Society, which attracted the support of such leaders as Adams, Franklin, Jefferson, and Madison, bore a coat of arms described by Baron in this way:

The coat of arms as a whole, and its motto [yield, honours, to the tongue] stress the importance of language and letters, while the Genius of Arms, holding the Constitution in one hand, points with the other - the right hand - to the Philological Society, a gesture which raises that enthusiastic if immodest group to national prominence. Language is also raised to a level of the greatest importance, where, equated with American independence and the American state itself, it has remained, at least symbolically, to the present day. (Baron p.20)

Here is an iconographic representation of the identity between culture and their own class that exposes the elite's interest as clearly as the Jeffersonian building projects. The point about the Society (and the



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proposed Academy) is that they set about the process of defining 'American' rhetoric, establishing norms according to the prerogative of those who imposed them. The 'American language' was objectified, and so alienated from the majority of those who spoke it. Even Noah Webster, a presiding presence in this aspect of contemporary American life, is not the linguistic democrat that he has sometimes been suggested to be. Granted, he propagandised American orthography, but as Charles Swann says, his politics were: 'consistently conservative and hierarchical, where commitment to representative democracy is the stronger the further the representative is kept from his constituents'. As Baron also remarks, exposing the grammarian's political motivation: 'Not only does Webster call for a Federal Language, he plans and markets it as well, turning the idea of American English into a career' (Baron p.11, my emphasis).<sup>26</sup>

Yet while imposing their limited theoretical view throughout American society, the elite also exploited rhetoric's coercive abilities. Building on the colonial legacy of sermons and legal sessions, many other occasions for oratorical display were developed: party conventions, lectures, hustings, and public orations, especially the commemorative rituals of the Fourth of July. Some examples of these latter will be given below, but it is important to recognize that members of the elite were trained to derive the full potential from the 'democratic occasions' they engineered for themselves. Universities such as Yale and Harvard ran courses in rhetoric, teaching, for instance, the approach to be adopted towards an uneducated audience: "the more impudent a candidate appears before the public, the greater is his chance of success ... He assembles his constituents, and mounting a stump, harangs [sic] on his merits, with unblushing effrontery"<sup>27</sup> And while for other occasions a more subtle

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approach was suggested, if the audience remained unmoved by: "the honies of persuasion", then one could: "hold up profit, lucre, money-making, pleasure and escape from pain. Deter them also by the prospect of shame and ignominy". This method was intended for: "gross, ignorant, untutored minds", and was clearly class-inspired, advocated as it was by John Quincy Adams, Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard, and later President of the Union. Herman Melville acquired a copy of Adams' lectures from his brother-in-law, which emphasises his family's typical elitist status.<sup>29</sup>

Paralleling the efforts of these institutions was the system of lyceums, and the national schools that it did so much to foster. Carl Bode shows how these became in the U.S.A. town associations for mutual improvement. Here emphasis was on 'brotherhood': "From all the divisions, ranks and classes of society, we are to meet ... to instruct and be instructed. While we mingle together in these pursuits ... we shall remove many of the prejudices which ignorance or partial acquaintance with each other fostered."<sup>29</sup> Yet as this very expression shows, and as the membership of the American lyceum national committee demonstrates, the lyceum movement in the States was soon no more than another elaborate apparatus of disguised social control. Lectures replaced discussions and the movement became a pressure-group for a national school system espousing 'simple' Bible values.<sup>30</sup>

But does this rhetorical 'idea of America' have any stylistic hallmarks, and was there no attempt to question it?

If anything characterises the majority of the public orations and Fourth of July speeches, it is the note of celebration in the face of threat. The celebration is of the Constitution, the Union, and the people's

supposedly instrumental part in establishing these things. The threat is of the dissolution of the political settlement, and hence of general relapse into tyranny:

These principles of civil liberty, and this system of popular government, America has attempted to maintain and perpetuate, principally by the more complete extension, development and practical adoption of the principle of representation ... It is worthy of remark, that this great leading principle in our government does not derive its sanction from the Constitution, but on the contrary, gives to that Constitution all the sanction it possesses. The adoption of the Constitution itself, the highest act which a people can exercise, was entrusted to representatives delegated for that purpose ... It depends on yourselves, Americans, whether so fair a prospect shall be blasted.<sup>31</sup>

This 1815 Oration by Lemuel Shaw is a particularly unemotional example of the genre, but it does exhibit the attitudes I have been suggesting. Responsibility for the establishment, and hence for the maintenance of the Union, is imputed to lie with the general population. In a move of classical simplicity, Shaw explains that as the people founded the state, the state's continued health is their concern. Any role that could be ascribed to any particular class is obscured, and so the advantages that this particular settlement has for his own elite (who were actually those who formed the Constitution) are mystified.

A similar strategy informs the later and more famous orations delivered by Daniel Webster at the foot of the Bunker Hill Monument. In both speeches, Webster uses the Monument itself as a physical artifice, in place of the implied 'threat', (although this can also be distinguished in the Second Oration). The column, in Webster's description, subsumes into itself all societal division. The trick, again, is while acknowledging difference in status to emphasise that everyone's achievement is celebrated in its stones:

We wish that this structure may proclaim the magnitude and importance of that event [the Battle of Bunker Hill] to every class and every age ... We wish that labor may look up here, and be proud, in the midst of its toil ... yea, look



abroad upon the whole earth, and see what a name you have contributed to give your country, and what a praise you have added to freedom, and then rejoice in the sympathy and gratitude which beam upon your last days from the improved condition of mankind!<sup>32</sup>

Again, by cleverly suggesting a spurious commonality, the orator hides the exploitative role of his own class in the process.

While it would be possible to analyse hundreds of similar speeches, and so to identify shared characteristics, in this section I wish only to alert the reader to the intrinsically political nature of nineteenth-century elitist rhetoric, and to point<sup>out</sup> that the elite attempted to hide this fact. The emotion, the use of symbolism, and the fiction of shared responsibility, which contribute to the masking of agents and the proliferation of passives, all work to 'neutralise' the elite's involvement in their own enterprise. It is not that:

The principles of the government which Hamilton and Jefferson built, have been discussed; and the discussion has resulted in familiarizing the minds of the people with the great thoughts, and the noble enthusiasm, of the architects and builders.<sup>33</sup>

but that through stage-managed discussion, those principles have been imposed on the people. So when a commentator such as Boorstin suggests that the speeches were 'helping the nation publicly discover itself', he has himself been duped, because his analysis ignores the way that language and representation shape reality. His mimetic assumption hides the fact that in such speeches the elite discovered the nation 'for' the people, according to its own 'idea of America'.<sup>34</sup> As David Simpson says, attempting to fix 1840 as the date at which this oratorical discourse became full-grown:

An explicit recognition of class distinctions and differences of interest ... is replaced by a disingenuous rhetoric of equality in which there are no workers and no employers, and in which all have the same interests and the same opportunity for profit and progress. Thus was born that enduringly vague entity and smokescreen for a multitude of political priorities, the American people ... And if both ends of the political spectrum are now speaking the same language, that of the 'people', we can no longer make any easy assumptions about the political affiliations of the writers who represent it. On the one



hand, no writer or speaker can be assumed to be of the people just because he sends out populist signals in the form of racy idioms and dialect words, as Emerson and Whitman were to do. On the other hand, no one who chooses not to invoke such a style should be defined without closer inspection as a conservative or an aristocrat.<sup>35</sup>

The references here to 'writers' prepare the way for the following discussion about contemporary literature, but it is instructive to conclude this section by briefly considering the plight of the rhetorically disenfranchised. The workers obviously challenged the elite, but in their many alternative Declarations of Rights and peoples' constitutions, with their explicit class-analysis, they of course infringed the basic rule reiterated every Fourth of July, that the elite's Constitution and its Union were 'inalienable':

Declaration of Independence of the Producing from the Non-Producing Class

'The non-producing aristocracy are still monopolizing more of the property of the country, making the difference greater between the immensely rich and the immensely poor'.

'They have not only monopolized the earth, but they have created estates out of annuities and stocks, thus further taxing the people with the interest upon them.' ...

... 'And for the support of this list of facts and Declaration of our Principles and Independence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, and fortunes, and our sacred honour.'<sup>36</sup>

v) Literature

Just as critics have tended to ignore the class politics of nineteenth-century rhetoric, so they have been similarly negligent when analysing the literature of the period. Until recently, this has resulted not only in the suggestion that contemporary poets, playwrights, and novelists excised class concerns from their work, but also that there was a sphere of privileged literary discourse, distinct from that of 'general' writing. The opposite, however, was the case, and literature, just like

oratory, in its institutions, style, and content, was class-inspired and controlled. It, too, was subtle political polemic.

An example may make this assertion clearer. The category of 'romance' has frequently dominated discussion about the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne. This is inspired by the Prefaces which he himself wrote for some of his books, for example *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851):

When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not himself have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a Novel.<sup>37</sup>

Consequently, a school of romance theorists developed, recently represented most clearly by Michael Bell. In his book *The Development of American Romance*, Bell isolates comments such as the above, using them as a critical key with which to unlock the 'essence' of writers such as Melville and Hawthorne:

They openly advertised the apparent congruence between the specific problem of form and validity in fiction and the more general problem of form and validity in their new national culture and, ultimately, in any culture. In such terms, the romancer's formal experiments, his fear of the artifice and sincerity of forms, took on, by analogy, a specifically cultural or social dimension.<sup>38</sup>

While seeming to offer insight into the relationship between literary and social discourse, this approach in fact scoops the historical into the poetic, and leads to readings such as this, of the story 'Young Goodman Brown':

So Ethan Brand succumbs to 'the Idea that possessed his life' (99), and it is thus that Young Goodman Brown, like most of Hawthorne's Puritans, ends up being trapped by an allegory of his own making. Indeed, the besetting sin of Hawthorne's Puritans - and the one he most frequently scrutinizes, particularly in dealing with the second and third generations - is their insistence on allegorizing experience into rigid 'iron' forms, cut off from life and suppressive of it, (Bell p.136)

Here Bell is interested in the characters' psychology, and the apparent insight that study of this gives into Hawthorne's own creative

preoccupations, not into the kind of statement that he may be making about the workings of society. The fact that Hawthorne's story is situated within a specific historical milieu, and written for a specific audience that inhabits a specific set of social relations is apparently irrelevant. The novel/romance (and allegory/symbolism) opposition that Bell and his peers think they identify in Hawthorne's Prefaces means that they edit out the political content of both his life and works.

Hawthorne's authorship of a campaign biography for President Franklin Pierce, the candidate of 'a coalition of Southern planters and Northern businessmen', an essay on his own views 'Chiefly about War Matters', and his son Julian's comment that 'the prospect of the dissolution of that mighty nation which had embodied the best hopes of mankind was a deep pain to him', are all noticed by Bell (pp.172, 268), but are not deemed to affect the author's supposed central 'artistic' interest.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, his authorship of a history of America for children (*My Grandfather's Chair, Famous Old People, and Liberty Tree*, 1860), which is deeply imbued with elitist attitudes, is not even recognised.<sup>40</sup> This inevitably means that the conservative conclusion of a 'romance' such as *The House of the Seven Gables*, with its dream of an 'elegant country seat' (HSG p.273), is not subjected to adequate political scrutiny, only to the bemused comment: 'Hawthorne may intend irony here; if so, it is an irony he refuses to explore' (Bell p.182).

Such a reading seems to typify 'essentialist' approaches to nineteenth-century American literature. In the section that follows, I shall explore some of the links that Bell denies: between the literary institution and politics, and between various genres, whether 'high' or 'low'. This is to challenge what I see as a previously dehistoricizing



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trend in American criticism, and to contest the way in which the nineteenth-century authors attempted to void their texts of overt political impact. Only through reclaiming this hidden historical perspective can we truly begin to understand their work.<sup>41</sup>

So what was it that enabled the 'literary institution' in the mid-nineteenth-century to function as a political tool? Research on this is still in its infancy, little having been done since William Charvat's ground-breaking analysis *Literary Publishing in America 1790-1850*. Sociologists and historians have only slowly developed Charvat's work, the most recent being Lawrence Buell, whose *New England Literary Culture From Revolution Through Renaissance* was published in 1986. From these and other pieces of evidence, however, it is possible to assemble at least the outlines of a picture.<sup>42</sup>

Charvat demonstrates how a 'publishing axis' was formed between New York and Philadelphia, enabling this twin centre to dominate the entire nation, except perhaps for New England. This was important, because it increased the authors' natural dependency on the publishers; because they could not take their trade elsewhere it was thus difficult to dissent from the publishers' desired output. So native authors had to conform to certain 'acceptable' kinds of work, which Charvat laments (p.60), because they could always be threatened by the huge sales of cheap foreign reprints. J.Barnes chronicles the efforts the authors made to obtain copyright restrictions, and in doing so exposes the publishers' political tactics. While claiming that these imports broke the power of 'privilege' "A democratic culture founded on the 'voluntary principle,' is one for the masses; our 'better educated classes' imbibe anti-democratic habits from

English literature"', what actually happened was that those same anti-democratic works were made to permeate further through society, submerging the voices of the workers.<sup>43</sup>

Such an analysis, moreover, implies a basic alliance of interest between the authors and publishers, and this is, indeed, what pertained. Nina Baym has studied how certain styles, topics, and forms of rhetoric were either commended or marginalised by reviewers. This resulted in a set of conventions intended to police the literary market-place; to contravene them usually led to denunciation. Her insight has important consequences for the study of so-called 'central' authors:

[Previous] 'history' enables us to imagine Hawthorne and Melville working inside a cultural envelope in which nobody liked and nobody read novels. My study uncovers a different culture, one where their troubles might have derived from their decisions not to write, or their inability to write, novels in an era that would have accepted almost anything, if it came in that much-loved form.<sup>44</sup>

The main point, that all authors worked in an environment that inevitably shaped their output, is well-expressed. Moreover, it supports Buell's discovery that as a group, contemporary authors were all usually educated elitists. Hence, although they were dependent on publishers' patronage and the support of reviewers, there was no widespread desire to rebel at all. This is why I speak of the 'literary institution'. Although there were exceptions, authors, publishers, and reviewers all participated in the shared capitalist project that was nineteenth-century American 'literature'; the dissemination of their own political outlook through the country, and its imposition on to the readership by means of the printed word.<sup>45</sup>

## vi) Varieties of Literary Genres

The actual extent to which mid-nineteenth-century American literature was another ideological implement of the dominant elite can be grasped by considering some of the different genres of the period. This politicisation is clearly apparent in the general movement known as Literary Young America. This group was a wing of the stridently nationalistic Young America campaign, and counted among its major adherents Evert Duyckinck, Melville's friend. Duyckinck used his editorship of the magazine *The Literary World* to call for a 'truly' American writing style. Michael Rogin says of the movement: 'In everyday parlance, the phrase brought together political nationalism, cultural independence, youthful self-assertion, and the West'.<sup>46</sup> Its leadership was not, needless to say, from the 'lower classes'.

So in order to be published at all, a book had to be suitably deferential to the class-bound 'idea of America', and to employ the elite's sanctioned rhetoric. Even genres which seem to express no overt political content actually fulfilled these conditions. They were promoted to be read throughout society, and were extremely popular. Certain of these genres - South Seas missionary memoirs and sea stories - will be discussed below, but consider, for instance, the general travel memoir. These were often overtly imperialist tracts, which fostered the reader's complicity in attitudes that sponsored colonialism:

The diversity of feature of the romantic Island of Otaheite formed a strong contrast with the monotonous appearance of the coral formations; the variety of hill and valley, and of woods and rivers in the one, after the sameness of flat, sterile, parched-up surface of the other ... were gratifying in the extreme.<sup>47</sup>

Here the evocation of a beautiful landscape that seems refreshingly

familiar to the Western eye, disguises the effects of disease and cultural and economic disruption which inevitably follow Western missionaries and explorers. Unpleasant features such as intractable natives are neatly smoothed away, and the reader must fight to retain critical distance. As in the political speeches, the rhetoric is designed to incorporate the reader into the authorial position by mystifying dissent and emphasising supposedly shared attitudes. It is assumed that one will endorse the author's basic imperialism, and that one will relish the thought of Pacific pleasure grounds just as much as he does.

I shall scrutinise the political inspiration of South Seas travels more closely in chapters two and three, but it should be stressed at this point that political views were not only articulated in books of journeys to exotic lands; the tendency was endemic to the genre. The immensely popular *Views A-foot*, by Bayard Taylor, is a good example of the way that the politics of art and the social settlement interacted.<sup>48</sup> Taylor began his journey as a penniless but educated young man - a child of the elite who had fallen on hard times - and through the production and consumption of his memoirs became a national celebrity and class hero. According to Appleton's *Cyclopoedia*, Taylor, a printing apprentice, decided that 'by this time [1844] he found a trade distasteful, and, to gratify his desire for travel and study in Europe', offered to finance a trip by writing 'letters' for his publisher employer. These, later produced in book form as *Views A-foot*, ensured his celebrity; in addition to his writing, he became a political figure, spoke in the Civil War for the 'National Cause', and acted as Representative in St.Petersburg.<sup>49</sup> The point, however, is that the supposedly 'inert' travel memoir secured his social position. This is because in *Views A-foot*, Taylor combined populist anti-British polemic with





JOHN PAUL JONES.



GEORGE WASHINGTON

George Washington and John Paul Jones, 'American Heroes' in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, July 1855, February 1856.<sup>2</sup>



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romantic nationalism, which (perhaps generally shared) sentiment, he constructed over a class-bound base. On close analysis, his remarks about the working classes are uniformly pejorative. Comments that they lived in a 'beastly state of intoxication' (Taylor p.13), are not made to criticise the industrial system, but to emphasise the enjoyment to be gained from observing the: 'sublimity in this human Niagara' (Taylor p.38). While the general sentiments of the book seem to be democratic, underground forces are at work, and Taylor's basic aim is revealed to be the dissemination of the prejudices of the elite more widely through society by fostering the growth of a quiescent public. Under the cloak of 'entertainment', class hierarchies are reinforced.

Alongside the travels is the heroic biography; a genre in which the elite again used rhetoric to suggest that its partisan attitudes were shared across society. Through it a canon of 'heroes' was imposed on to the population. Those who were considered fit for general consumption were all 'true Americans', and they included Jefferson, Franklin, John Paul Jones, and of course Washington. The subject of countless pamphlets, books, and magazine articles, these men were held to exemplify the highest American qualities. Their rhetorically created and disseminated personae, however, disguised the fact that they were arrogant, elitist, and frequently violent. These qualities were excised from both the texts of their lives and the drawings which usually adorned them. The frontispieces opposite are typical examples: the weapons are stylised objects of glory, seemingly not of death and destruction, while the inset picture of Mount Vernon affiliates Washington to those 'classical' values so beloved of his age, which as we have seen are in reality an elitist sham. The strategems used in the texts parallel those in the pictures;

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they enabled millions to read about the 'heroes' magnificent achievement in the creation of 'inalienable' republican institutions - institutions which the biographies were actually designed to protect:

The result was the present Constitution of the United States, on the whole probably the most sagacious instrument which ever came from uninspired minds. It has made the United States of America what they are now ...

... "There are some things," he wrote, "in this new form, I will readily acknowledge, which never did, and I am persuaded never will, obtain my cordial approbation. But I did then conceive, and do now most firmly believe, that in the aggregate it is the best Constitution that can be obtained at this epoch, and that this or a dissolution awaits our choice, and is the only alternative."<sup>50</sup>

As the tone of this passage shows, the biographies suggested that support for class-inspired settlements, such as the Constitution, was both normative (most 'sagacious') and general; dissent was once again outlawed by literary means.

This was even more true in the case of religious tracts. These were intended for the largest circulation of all, and were very cheap, the clear motivation being to ensure that anyone who could read would be faced with them. Sold on the doorstep, they typically presented the inhabitants with a demand to place faith in God, and so eschew protest in this world for the joys of heaven in the next. The main emphases were on piety, faith, and submission, and these were advocated by using an accusatory second person address: 'If you have hitherto lived unconcerned, oh! reflect - the time is short - your days are fast spending and wasting'.<sup>51</sup> The extent to which they were consciously designed as a literature of control can be seen in the fact that their authors and publishers specifically "' adapted [them] to the various ages, capacities and conditions of individuals and families'", and aimed "'to supply with ... standard evangelical volumes the entire accessible population of the United States'".<sup>52</sup> Given that they were produced by the elite for the masses, and

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that they sought to inhibit social conflict, it is not surprising that as the sectional tensions mounted, and as trade crises multiplied, the American Tract Society inexorably increased its production (from 3 million in 1846 to 12 million in 1855).

#### vii) Novels

The above discussion of travels, biographies, and tracts possibly implies a hierarchy of 'manipulation' by the literary institution. Travels, designed more for elitist readers, are simply 'confirmatory' of attitudes; biographies, with a wider, less educated audience in mind, are noticeably more polemical; religious tracts, designed for all who can read, are the most openly directive. Yet, basic rhetorical techniques and attitudes are common across all the genres; a point which is also true when we consider mid-nineteenth-century novels. Indeed, this should not be surprising when it is remembered that an author such as Susan Warner began her career as a distributor of tracts. There was a unity of approach to the entire literary field. Hence, popular novels by authors 'great' or now forgotten participated in the literary dissemination of the elite's 'idea of America'. Obviously I can only give a flavour of this politicisation, but by concentrating on two of the most popular works of the period, I hope the reader will be able to see my point.

Warner's *The Wide Wide World* was published in 1850 and Maria Cummins' *The Lamplighter* in 1854. At a basic level, both books are interesting for the attitudes that they endorse, and for the subjects that they omit to consider. In each, a world of servants, big houses,

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entertainments, and social gatherings is described and accepted as the norm. In *The Lamplighter*, different parts of the country are referred to simply as different venues for pleasure at which the same cast gathers; New Orleans, Boston, and New York are the common home of the leisured characters in whom Cummins is interested, not prospective antagonists in an incipient war. In both novels, the heroine is portrayed as a paragon of civilised behaviour, who suppresses her own interests to serve those of others. While they are never insipidly quiescent, Ellen and Gertrude are also never serious threats to the social status quo. Indeed, their whole function in the texts is to propagandise that settlement. Ellen (the heroine of *The Wide Wide World*), who is high-spirited as a child, once fed by her adopted family on her diet of Bible, prayer, self-examination, and Weems' *Life of Washington*, then sets herself to instil these new virtues in others. Her primary targets are Nancy Vawse, and Farmer Van Brunt, two social inferiors, with whom she works by, for instance, reading from *Pilgrim's Progress*. Gertrude (the heroine of *The Lamplighter*), whose rise from poverty and orphanhood to social exemplar is even more striking than Ellen's, also acts as a quiet proselyte, changing by example the behaviour of the flighty Kitty Ray.

The desired aim in reading these novels is, then, for the audience to emulate the characters' attitude to life. The consequences of such an attitude have been well-analysed by Nina Baym, especially as they affect images and expectations of women. Yet the wider implications are also clear. The world portrayed is one of hierarchy, deference, and emphatic morality. The men do not seem to work, and workers are certainly not described, except as idealised farm-hands. The authorial rhetoric assumes its implied standards to be shared by both the characters and the readers,



and even when this tends to criticise the excesses of 'fashion', as this extract shows, it is only to reinforce the impression that America is a land in which all is genial and just:

Saratoga is a queer place. One sees congregated there, at the height of the season, delegates from every part of our own and from many foreign countries. Fashion's ladder is transplanted thither, and all its rounds are filled. Beauty, wealth, pride, and folly are well represented; and so, too, are wit, genius, and learning. Idleness reigns supreme, and no one, not even the most active, busy, and industrious citizen of our working land, dares, in this her legitimate province, to dispute her temporary sway. Every rank of society, every profession, and almost every trade, meet each other on an easy and friendly footing ...<sup>53</sup>

Clearly, America was not such a land at this time; yet the novels proposed that this partisan impression was normative, and by disseminating it throughout society, worked to ensure that it became normative.

This argument depends on sensitivity to the novels' particular rhetoric, and on a willingness to accept that this rhetoric is intrinsic to a general ideological stance. In focussing on the class elements in Warner and Cummins, it stresses an aspect of their work which is still fairly new in critical discourse; but the method employed is now becoming more accepted. Jane Tompkins, for instance, considers *The Wide Wide World* as a piece of evidence about the social position and aspiration of nineteenth-century women. For her, the chosen language denotes a sexual subversiveness which makes of a life apparently 'contracted to the dimensions of a closet' still one in which 'one received the power to save the world'.<sup>54</sup> This is to emphasise a different quality in the text from the one that I do - and one that for me is contentious - but it is to recognise the political aspect of the rhetoric employed. Most importantly, it is to acknowledge that these books, which have so often been treated as 'sub-literature', are integral to a whole literary scene, encompassing all

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forms of the printed word. And indeed, because such works were so immensely popular, it is through studying them and their affiliated genres that we should approach the output of other contemporary authors, who while being popular now, were perhaps not so popular in their own time.

In both nineteenth-century oratory and literature, then, we are dealing with systems of power. There is the power that the establishment or 'institution' exerts over the intended audience, and there is the structure of power within the speech or text as author, narrator, characters and implied audience meet in its framework. Both of these systems are disguised. The difficulty that this nexus caused for those who sought to challenge it is the subject for the remainder of this thesis, which focusses on the work of Herman Melville. It was necessary, however, first to indicate that mid-nineteenth-century literature, because it was elite-inspired, demonstrates that elite's hegemonic political intentions in its very rhetoric. It is now time to consider how Herman Melville relates to this picture.<sup>ss</sup>

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Part Two: The specific novelist: *Herman Melville 1819-91*

Melville's work, like that of the other writers considered above, was formed by the politicised society into which he was born. That society's class stratification, ideological conception of language and literature, and peculiar 'idea of America', governed both the way that he wrote, and the pattern of his career. To preface my main topic - the consideration of how Melville's early novels related to contemporary society and politics - it is worthwhile to conclude these introductory remarks with an analysis of his early life and some of his shorter works (including his first published pieces). This will help to focus the reader's attention more closely on some of the methods and preoccupations of those early novels, and on the special qualities of Melville's relationship with his society.

1) Family

The fact that Melville was born into one of the country's leading families had a vital effect on his subsequent writing, perhaps even on his decision to write at all.

Although the Melville-Gansevoorts were losing some of their prestige by the time of Melville's birth, they were incontestably still a stock example of the middle-to-upper-class families whose influence on the young republic had been so powerful. In their social relations and self-conception, if not in brute wealth, they remained throughout the century a typical elitist clan. Both of Melville's grandparents were heroes in the Revolutionary War, and his mother's family, the Gansevoorts, were affluent merchants of Dutch descent in New York State.

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Allan Melville, Herman's father, was a gentleman merchant who exemplified the complex of values outlined above as the 'idea of America'. He was vehemently patriotic, saluting "our national Eagle", and relished: "this land of national liberty, where reason is left free to combat error".<sup>56</sup> He extolled the virtue of self-help, typically associating this with religion: "I have succeeded beyond my expectations, and find my credit as well established as I could wish; my prospects are good, & with the favour of Providence, & my usual prudence and industry, I have no fear of the result" (Metcalf p.2). But representative of his class, he periodically acknowledged that although he worked hard, the political settlement pleasantly tipped the scales in his favour: "I do not hesitate to declare that of all publick [sic.] systems of government, the republican appears to me the best, this form is the most congenial to our natures" (Metcalf pp.12-13; my emphasis).

Unfortunately, Allan's eventual bankruptcy, arising from dubious credit manipulation, exposed the disparity between his private (or should one say 'initiate'?) conception of society, and his Chesterfieldian public face.<sup>57</sup> This episode reveals the underside of patrician rule: for years, Allan had been using his family name and influence to maintain a business that could not actually support him - he had been trading on status. The fact that this 'old boys' club' system failed in Allan's case does not indicate the basic 'fairness' of contemporary society, but acknowledges that Allan himself was now incapable of adequately playing the social charade. (There is evidence that he suffered some kind of psychological illness, and that he eventually became mad.) One of the most significant features of the episode is that after his death, the whole family rallied round to prove that even if Alan had 'failed', his children were still to be



brought up with a full awareness of their rights and duties as legitimate members of the elite. Until her sons were able to support her in their own right, Maria Melville existed entirely on unstinting family charity. Even when they were themselves stretched to the limit, her brothers Peter and Leonard never allowed her to sink irretrievably low - the contemporary class system must remain solid.<sup>50</sup> It is no surprise to find that Maria's actions and attitudes, and those of Gansevoort, the eldest son, are virtually indistinguishable from Allan's own.

Gansevoort took the lead, by establishing his own trading business, just as his father had done. His comments on this venture could easily have come from Allan himself: "to make money, it only requires a cool dispassionate disposition joined with talents even below mediocrity, and a determination to sacrifice every inclination and feeling that may come in contact with it" (Metcalf p.15). Even when this enterprise also failed, Gansevoort maintained his belief that loyalty to his class was even more important than money. This loyalty can be seen in a series of letters he wrote from New York to ensure that the correct values were being instilled in his youngest brother: "I entreat you my dear brother to read this letter more than once - to ponder on it - to refer to it whenever your will is wavering and your endeavor weak - and then act as I would have you act" (Metcalf p.25).

Maria, similarly, sought to teach her children the importance of their heritage, correcting their spelling and guiding their behaviour with a doggedness that exceeds simple maternal concern:

"My dear Allan [Herman's younger brother], by Herman who came up last evening I receiv'd your beautifully written letter, excuse me if I again require you to be more careful about the spelling of words, remember that *oblige* has but one *b*, & *Helen* but one *l* [sic.] that *pantaloons* are spelt without *er* ... "

The issue here was not young Allan's ability to spell, but his whole inheritance; which is also why Maria maintained a servant, and while totally dependant on her relatives' charity 'promptly promised her new landlord half a year's rent in advance if he would put up blinds on the front of the house immediately' (Gilman p.101). Maintaining standards of speech and behaviour would reinforce in a concrete way the Melville family's status to their inquisitive lower-class neighbours. As Veblen saw so clearly later in the century:

Elegant diction, whether in writing or speaking, is an effective means of reputability - great purity of speech is presumptive evidence of several successive lives spent in other than vulgarly useful occupations.<sup>69</sup>

Persistence and rigid adherence to the elite's social rules eventually paid off. Gansevoort became a lawyer and a Democratic politician, Allan likewise became a lawyer, and some of the daughters made respectable marriages. From the Melville example it seems that in the nineteenth-century U.S.A., conformity to the dominant ethic, allied with initial good birth, could be enough to secure prosperity, whatever the interim reversals. But it was conformity to the dominant ethic that was most important, as Herman's distinctive history stresses.

#### ii) Herman Melville

Given the Melville family's evident political stance, it is perhaps curious that the standard biographies of Herman Melville frequently underestimate this factor in his upbringing. His maritime experiences and subsequent are presented as romantic adventures. His rebellious and pungent social criticism is diluted into romanticised oratory. And yet this is explicable; these standard works, now nearly forty years old, are

themselves influenced by the vestiges of an 'idea of America', still extant even in 1950, the publication date of Leon Howard's *Herman Melville*. (They may, of course, also have been determined by a contemporary McCarthy-induced recoil from criticism of things American). Now that scholarly approaches and political attitudes have changed, it is time to propose an alternative reading.<sup>60</sup>

I will, however, only draw attention to one or two salient points. As will be seen, I think Melville's writings must be the foundation for any adequate estimation of his political affiliations. His elitist family provided a context against which he reacted, and this dissent is recorded in his published and unpublished works. Despite the efforts of historians, the destruction of letters and the sheer lack of evidence means that much of Melville's biography will always be a matter for conjecture.

Yet there seems to have been a kind of dialectic between the family and the author. The Melvilles apparently thought their younger son was 'more sedate ... less bouyant [sic.] in mind' (Metcalf p.9), than his brother Gansevoort. Allan said: 'you will be as much surprised as myself to know, that Herman proved the best Speaker in the introductory Department of the High School, he has made rapid progress during the last 2 quarters' (Metcalf p.9). Gansevoort was the family star, something which his subsequent political career confirmed in their eyes. But although his parents thought Herman was less clever, they still saw him as a dependable and worthy boy:

Herman I think is making more progress than formerly, & without being a bright Scholar, he maintains a respectable standing, & would proceed further, if he could be induced to study more - being a most amiable & innocent child, I cannot find it in my heart to coerce him, especially as he seems to have chosen Commerce as a favorite pursuit, whose practical activity can well dispense with much book knowledge. (Metcalf p.10)



To what extent was Allan projecting his own conception of Herman's future on to his son? These statements are the context for an assessment of Melville's early ambitions. His own actions may articulate dissent from his parents' seeming intentions.

For instance, it seems that Herman was heavily influenced by his uncle Thomas, the family reprobate who failed as a merchant, and taken up farming in Pittsfield Massachusetts, but was failing at this too. Herman, unlike the rest of the family, clung to his uncle. He often stayed with the Pittsfield Melvilles in his youth, enjoyed the manual work of the farm, and visited the family when it was forced to move inland to Galena, Illinois. Importantly, he wrote a memoir of Thomas, published in Smith's *History of Pittsfield* (1876), and which is the only piece that he ever wrote directly about his family. It is an affectionate portrait: 'suddenly, under the accumulation of reminiscences, his eye would glisten and become humid. With a start he would check himself in his reverie, and give an ultimate sigh; as much as to say, "Ah well" and end with an aromatic pinch of snuff' (quoted Metcalf p.16). The contentment in this fire-side musing subverts the frantic necessity to 'achieve' on society's terms, so characteristic of most Melvilles. Certainly Thomas shared his relatives' patrician status, and probably their social attitudes, but the fact that Melville sought his uncle out, even in later life, suggests that Thomas was also sympathetic to this rather odd young man. Could it be argued that the Pittsfield farm provided Melville with an alternative, warm, humane environment in which to grow, very different from the stilted, conformist Lansingburgh household? Interestingly, after his first success had passed, Melville chose in 1850 to quit the beau monde of New York, and move to a farm in Pittsfield. Was this an effort to recapture the happy experiences

of his adolescence there with uncle Thomas?

Melville's stance as regards his uncle matches his seeming contradiction of his family's expectations for his own career. He submitted at thirteen to work as a clerk in the New York State Bank (of which his uncle Peter was a director), and his membership of the Albany Young Men's Association for Mutual Improvement and involvement with the Philologus Society, the debating wing of the A.Y.M.A., were conventional, elitist actions. Nevertheless, in 1837, he decided to become a school-master, which possibly indicates his different attitudes. Although education was one of the ways that the elite chose to socialise other classes, a letter Herman wrote to his uncle Peter suggests a surprisingly independent view:

Orators may declaim concerning the universally-diffused blessings of education in our Country, and Essayests [sic.] may exhaust their magazine of adjectives in extolling our systim [sic.] of Common School instruction, - but when reduced to practise, the high and sanguine hopes excited by its imposing appearance in *theory* - are a little dashed, *Letters* No.2

This is more than a little sceptical of contemporary propaganda.

These flaws in the standard biography make it possible to argue that the young Herman was seeking his own course in life, free from the 'helping hand' of family influence. Rejecting banking, the law, or trade (all solutions chosen by his brothers), he tried first teaching, then surveying, then the sea, and finally whaling, possibly the most disreputable of all contemporary occupations; a move which was received with horror by the family, but that seems to have been a definite decision on his part. Rather than lurching from job to job in a desperate effort to regain wealth and status, as previous biographies have suggested he did, it seems that within evident familial pressures Melville tried to follow his own way, and that his last move was a direct challenge to their

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authority.<sup>61</sup> It was this that inducted him into the capitalist underworld, and inspired his first full-length dissentient novel, *Typee*.

### iii) Writings: Method

Before considering those early novels, beginning with *Typee*, however, let us briefly isolate Melville's characteristic method. To do this, I have chosen the very first pieces that he published, in which his approach was probably more instinctive than fully conscious, together with another short later work, *Bartleby the Scrivener* (1856).

In April and May 1839 Melville published two sketches entitled *Fragments from a Writing Desk*, in the *Democratic Press and Lansingburgh Advertiser*. These thus date from before his first voyage, again suggesting that the seeds of his social outlook were sown before his sea-going experience. The *Fragments* are highly wrought and self-consciously florid. *Fragment No.1* is a letter in which a young man lists the charms of three beautiful women to his friend. *Fragment No.2* tells of how a 'hero' is given a mysterious letter by a messenger, whom he follows, and having been winched up into a house hidden among trees, is ushered into the presence of another beauty, only to find that she is deaf and dumb. Hence the narrative world is clearly that of the sentimental novel. Even if the tone is more reminiscent of slightly dated gothic horror in No. 2, the reclusive heroine is typical. Emily Graham is such a figure in *The Lamplighter*, and she is also blind.<sup>62</sup>

Thus the narrators of the *Fragments* address the standard, novel-reading audience that was also addressed by Cummins and Warner. They are



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keen to court this audience, and include many references intended to confirm the bond between narrator and reader. This is easy to see in *Fragment No.1*, when the implied reader is the addressee of the letter, but it is also a feature of *No. 2*:

Plucking up my spirits, which I can assure you, courteous reader, had fallen considerably below zero by the ill-success of my previous efforts, - I again rushed madly forward. (F2 p.1181)

Once, I am almost ashamed to own it to thee, gentle reader, my mind was so haunted with ghostly images, that in an agony of apprehension, I was about to turn and flee - (F2 p.1183)

Almost buried in the downy cushion on which it reposed, lay revealed the prettiest little foot you can imagine. (F2 p.1186)

Such rhetoric implies that the audience certainly shares the narrator's perspective on events, and so his outlook on life. The world of hot-house emotions, of love-letters, romantic poetry, parties, soirees, and amorous competition, is mutual. This leisured existence, unencumbered by work, is seen as the common property of reader and narrator.

But is it a world of which the author approves? Although the *Fragments* acknowledge the common attitudes of the readers and the narrator, do they not indicate a distance between those of Melville and 'his' narrator? In my reading, even at this young age, Melville is setting his audience a test. Rather than encouraging them to celebrate the bond they share with the narrator, whether he knew he was doing so or not, he is encouraging them to question it.

At root, both *Fragments* are clearly censurable. *No.1* lists the charms of three women, and asks the friend to help the narrator choose between them. Despite the rhetorical display, the tacit situation is one in which the only points to consider are the women's respective beauty, and the narrator's possible pleasure. *No.2*, again despite the oratory, is a tale of aroused lust exposed by its refusal to pity physical imperfection:

She was silent; gracious God! what horrible apprehension crossed my soul? - Frantic with the thought, I held her from me, and looking in her face, I met the same impassioned gaze; her lips moved - my senses ached with the intensity with which I listened, - all was still, - they uttered no sound; I flung her from me, even though she clung to my vesture, and with a wild cry of agony I burst from my apartment! - She was dumb! Great God, she was dumb! DUMB AND DEAF! (F2 p.1187)

Such a rejection should have been abominated even by the audience for *The Wide Wide World* and *The Lamplighter*; and this is the point. Although the indolent characters in these novels are the fictional counterparts of thousands of elite readers in mid-century America, those characters who draw their authors' approbation are those who care for the distressed - in *The Lamplighter*, specifically for the blind girl. The principle of charity rules. Melville's narrator, while sharing his audience's rhetoric, because he is unkind, was set up for their censure.

As there is no record of any contemporary reaction to the two *Fragments*, we must turn instead to the tradition of interpretation; it has been usual to see them as over-exuberant, youthful productions, not serious works. Leon Howard even suggests that they are a form of comedy, describing the second sketch as:

A narrative hoax which created a conventional atmosphere of romantic mystery around a silent though inviting beauty and then discomfited the reader's expectations by revealing that she was deaf and dumb. It was crude humor ... (Howard p.15)

This is to find humour in a situation that I feel was not humorous for Melville himself, and that he thought should also not be so for his audience. Although the *Fragments* may be crude, Melville is in them offering a distorted image of his society for its consideration, and ultimate rejection (the river-side setting and references to 'the Broadway of our village' make it clear that he has the actual situation of Lansingburgh in his mind - p.1174.). While the narrator's rhetoric

indicates his identity with his elitist audience, the author is hoping that that identity will be rejected.

Before condensing these comments into a clearer exposition of Melville's compositional method, it is salutary to complement this study of the *Fragments* with a brief analysis of *Bartleby the Scrivener*. Here, too, the reader is courted:

Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared to me, it is fit I make some mention of myself, my *employés*, my business, my chambers, and general surroundings. (*Bartleby* p.635)

(The reader of nice perceptions will here perceive that, it being morning, Turkey's answer is couched in polite and tranquil terms, but Nipper's replies in ill-tempered ones. Or, to repeat a previous sentence, Nipper's ugly mood was on duty, and Turkey's off.) (*Bartleby* p.645)

There would seem little need for proceeding further in this history. Imagination will readily supply the meagre recital of poor Bartleby's interment. But ere parting with the reader, let me say ... (*Bartleby* p.671)

Again, the audience is assumed to share the narrator's stance. In this case, the narrator is a wealthy lawyer, and the story concerns his inability to deal with a scrivener who comes to work for him, but refuses his labour. The rhetoric, in addition to establishing the bond with the audience, works to exonerate the narrator in their eyes:

As soon as tranquility returned I distinctly perceived that I had now done all that I possibly could, both in respect to the demands of the landlord and his tenants, and with regard to my own desire and sense of duty, to benefit Bartleby, and shield him from rude persecution. (*Bartleby* p.668)

The implication is that they, who share his values, would have acted in exactly the same way; nothing more could be done, his eventual death was a sad but necessary misfortune.

And yet, as with the narrators of the *Fragments*, this narrator is for Melville, the villain. He represents class, comfort, and respectability. He attends fashionable churches and boasts of his connection with the



entrepreneur John Jacob Astor. The final incentive to make him act against Bartleby is his censure by his colleagues and associates:

At last I was made aware that all through the circle of my professional acquaintance, a whisper of wonder was running round, having reference to the strange creature I kept at my office. This worried me very much. And as the idea came upon me of his possibly turning out a long-lived man, and keep occupying my chambers, and denying my authority; and perplexing my visitors; and scandalizing my professional reputation; and casting a general gloom over the premises; keeping body and soul together to the last upon his savings (for doubtless he spent but half a dime a day), and in the end perhaps outlive me, and claim possession of my office by right of his perpetual occupancy; as all these dark anticipations crowded in upon me more and more, and my friends continually intruded their relentless remarks upon the apparition in my room; a great change was wrought in me. I resolved to gather all my faculties together, and for ever rid me of this intolerable incubus, (*Bartleby* p.663)

I quote this passage at length because it is so revealing. The lawyer's primary motivation is social solidarity, and he is concerned also with his supposedly inalienable 'authority' by dint of his status, with his property, and with his projected inheritance. The response towards Bartleby gives little evidence of the 'idea of America's' much-vaunted social mobility. And what is Bartleby's crime? First, to withdraw his labour. Second, to occupy his 'master's' property. As we have seen, these are the two basic sins which brought the whole weight of the elite to smash nascent unions or dissentient parties.

But the problem with *Bartleby* is that unlike the *Fragments*, there is little with which the elitist readership would immediately disagree; the lawyer is an apparent paragon of sanctioned behaviour. This difference is both the mark of Melville's harsh experiences in the intervening years, and a register of his failed attempt to educate his audience to the nature of their attitudes in his novels.

Nevertheless, at least two episodes show <sup>the</sup> author's persistent wish to instruct his readers. Both are significant because they show Melville directing attention to rhetoric, focussing the audience, therefore, on the

way in which its language use illicitly constituted its social dominance.

The first episode is the narrator's attempted rhetorical self-justification:

But when this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him. How? Why, simply by recalling the divine injunction: 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.' Yes, this it was that saved me. *Bartleby* p.661

This is mere posturing, and is exposed when Bartleby's non-compliance and his fellow lawyers' censure forces the narrator to exclaim: 'In vain I persisted that Bartleby was nothing to me - no more than to any one else' (p.666). A more complex instance of the same subversive revelation is the lawyer's horror when he realises that Bartleby is 'infecting' his and his staff's own expression. Bartleby consistently refuses to work by using the words 'I would prefer not to'. The narrator is alarmed to find that 'prefer' has slipped into his own vocabulary:

Somehow, of late I had got into the way of involuntarily using this word 'prefer' upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions. And I trembled to think that my contact with the scrivener had already and seriously affected me in a mental way. (*Bartleby* p.655)

He is even more shocked when he hears it from his employees, who apparently remain unconscious that they are using it:

It was plain that it involuntarily rolled from his tongue. I thought to myself, surely I must get rid of a demented man, who already has in some degree turned the tongues, if not the heads of myself and my clerks. (*Bartleby* p.656)

The fear here is that the narrator, who uses language to secure his social position, may through contagion from Bartleby lose this necessary ability. Bartleby exists merely to replicate the lawyer's words; his refusal to do so posits the existence of alternative voices and scripts. While the lawyer, who is characteristically more attuned to rhetorical possibility than his underlings, has noticed the change and they have not, the chance exists that were they to notice it, they may begin to challenge his rhetorical dominance. Language is a game which he must always win,

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because it is the game that gets him his bread.

Thus in *Bartleby*, as in the *Fragments*, the narrator's use of rhetoric is scrutinised because it is pressurised by the author. Through manipulating the audience's own language-awareness, or by using other characters within the text, the intention is to force the readers to consider the narrative strategies deployed, and so to be distanced from the textual presence who is ostensibly most like themselves. Although the *Fragments* are very early, the fact that their method is similar to *Bartleby's* demonstrates Melville's underlying consistent approach.

Melville's basic compositional method is quite simple. He uses two processes, which can for ease be termed 'exemplification' and 'subversion'. In 'exemplification', characteristic rhetoric anchors the narrative in the conventional expectations of the contemporary audience. In 'subversion', the perceptive reader is made aware that the larger text that is actually being read is really a criticism of contemporary understanding, not a commendation of it. Hence, elitist use of language is turned against itself, and, in the case of novels, entertainment becomes sedition.

In the above example of the *Fragments from a Writing Desk*, we are offered what seem to be typical magazine pieces, and slowly become aware that they oppose the values that they apparently maintain. In *Bartleby*, the 'reasonable' narrator who is so representative of his class, is step by step exposed as the focus of authorial censure. Similarly, in *Benito Cereno* (1856), we gradually realise that it is the typical American liberal narrator who actually provides the seed-bed in which oppression has most opportunity to flourish. In each of these cases, it is the representative elitist narrator, with whom the audience finds community, that is



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repudiated by the underlying politics of the text. This dual movement that first rhetorically delineates typical class-based attitudes and then holds them up for scrutiny and repudiation is at the heart of Melville's method. Its central feature, is that representative narrator. On this figure, and his politically loaded narrative, Melville directs his gaze.<sup>63</sup>

While in essence all that Melville is doing is using a well-tried satirical technique, what is significant is the context in which he deploys his satire, and thus its particular nature. The thesis asserts that Melville's writing was intrinsically critical of the contemporary status quo, but that to be fully aware of this, one must understand his use of rhetoric. As I have argued, it is by sensitivity to the politics of language that the author's own perspective may be recovered. Hence the narrator is of primary significance as the presence in the text of 'typical' elitist values. Once it is recognised that the literature of the day was deeply politicised and that the readers would have identified with the narrators, lending them their own ideological assent, it is possible to see Melville's extensive political subversion.

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Part Three: 'The Interpretative Tradition'

I am, therefore, inviting my reader to scrutinise the inherited tradition of Melville-interpretation, and to project an alternative understanding of this author and his work. The so-called American Renaissance is often considered by critics as the flowering of American Romanticism, when the first truly 'distinctive' American voices, like Melville's, were heard.<sup>64</sup> The great writers of the period are frequently set on pedestals that attribute to them not only quality of expression and method, but also a certain mythical status, for instance in their exploitation of the new 'democratic' American language.<sup>65</sup> But to see Melville and his contemporaries as inhabiting a realm of timeless values, far above history, is to see them in a way that they would not themselves have done, and which Melville's texts tell us that he repudiated.

The simple fact of Melville's suppression by members of his own class, disproves such a reading. The entry on Melville in Appleton's *Cyclopaedia* is an interesting introductory comment in this context. This refers only to *Typee*, passing over all his other works, and in fact concentrates primarily on Melville's family (note that there is no mention of bankruptcy):

His grandfather Major Thomas Melvill (1751-1832), was a member of the Boston Tea Party, served in the Revolution, and is supposed to have been the last American that adhered through life to the cocked hat. His maternal grandfather was Peter Gansevoort (q.v.). His father, Allan, was a merchant, who travelled and cultivated literary tastes. (p.294)

This is only one example of the way that Melville's life and works have been moulded in order to assimilate them to the requirements of the dominant elite; it was possible to be 'a man who lived among the cannibals', but once it was recognised that this man was drawing on his

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experience as a way of challenging his own class and society, he had to be silenced. What better way was there to do this than by suggesting that he only dwelt among cannibals? A 'curiosity' can be contained.<sup>66</sup>

It is intrinsic to my view that Melville's textual production was a self-conscious process, and that it was formed and governed by the context in which he had to write. As we have seen, and as we repeatedly shall see, the tone and vocabulary employed, and the attitudes evoked, are not arbitrary. In the narrators, and in the narratives that they construct, contemporary positions are crystallised so clearly that a reader who is sensitive to matters of rhetoric can actually begin to consider them abstractly and objectively. In a sense, because the texts exemplify social and class attitudes so clearly, they allow the reader to grasp and interrogate them, through attending to language. As a result, the reader can begin to appreciate the ideological significance of the language employed. This approach even sheds light on a novel such as *Pierre* (1852), with its tragic depiction of the way that the young hero's sudden understanding of the relationship between politics and language only leads to his silencing and death.<sup>67</sup>

This exposition of Melville's method illustrates the need to consider his life and works and his contemporary society's values simultaneously, and to explore the interaction between them. Two questions, however, may still be raised.

First, if there is this discrepancy between the author and his narrator, is it possible directly to detect alternative values in the text from those of the narrator? Certainly, in different ways in different books, it becomes apparent that the author's opinions diverge from the narrator's, his supposed alter ego. In this shifting balance between



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narrator and 'author', Melville's own responses to social circumstance and to the public reaction to his novels can be appreciated. However, these alternative values are always established negatively; the author refrains from expressing his own, incontestible, opinion, preferring instead to allow this to emerge subversively. There is never a sudden 'authoritative' proclamation on contemporary events; the attentive reader can only recognise that in each book the narrator's position is progressively undercut, and hence that the values of his sponsoring society are challenged. This subtle process was demanded by the fact that overt social criticism would have been immediately labelled as 'un-American', and the books themselves never published. Thus the term 'subversion' is doubly apt, for it describes not only the way that Melville wrote, but also his attitude to the literary endeavour itself. Equally importantly, by denying to himself the exercise of authorial omnipotence, Melville is able to present in his texts an image of a world in which domination by linguistic manipulation is outlawed; his method implies a freedom for the reader that his contemporaries just would not allow.

This point partially answers the second question: why was Melville not immediately hailed as a great contemporary analyst, and his criticisms heeded? Those who were so blinkered by the society in which they lived are perhaps less significant here than that category of readers who did understand his arguments. As they weighed their material advantage with the claims of justice, advantage inevitably won. To criticize Melville for failing to express his dissatisfaction 'successfully' is actually more to criticize the impositions of the society than the author. In assessing reaction to the novels, I shall be concentrating on this latter category. Melville inevitably had to express his dissent in a way that would not be

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immediately silenced. The challenge that Melville's method sets his critics is to see that the narrators are being satirised; the full significance of their representative function is reduced if they are seen as inert typifications of contemporary attitudes, or as simple transcripts of the author's 'real' experiences. The whole point is that the attitudes they represent are interrogated, satirised and marginalised in the texts. It is this point that successive generations of commentators have failed to appreciate.<sup>68</sup> Let us now turn to Tommo, the first of those narrators.

*TYPEE*

'a singularly attractive and  
delightful work,'

*Daily Mercury* 23 March 1846



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Introduction

## 1) The Story

*Typee*, Melville's first full-length novel, was published in February and March 1846. It has consistently been read as a pleasant reminiscence of Pacific life, a 'singularly attractive and delightful work,' yet it is actually a striking exposure of the way that narrative manipulation was enlisted in the cause of imperialism in the nineteenth-century. This chapter will consider this reality which has been obscured by critical presentation, and attempt to explain why Melville wrote as he did, in a way that has repeatedly been denied or misunderstood. It will, therefore, consider at greater length the implications of Melville's compositional method sketched out above.

*Typee* tells of a sailor who with a young companion deserts his whale ship when in harbour in Nukuheva, one of the Marquesas Islands. Travelling into the mountains in the centre of the island, the two hope to make contact with a friendly tribe, the Happars, and to live with them until the ship leaves port. Unfortunately, they actually encounter members of the *Typee* tribe, the Happars' traditional enemies, who are believed to be cannibals. Taken to the valley, they live there in surprising comfort until Toby escapes. After some weeks, on being threatened with tattooing, and on finding evidence of cannibalism, Tommo, the narrator, takes advantage of the presence of a Western vessel in the bay at the end of the valley, and forces a path to it and 'freedom'. Much of the substance of the book is concerned with description of *Typee* customs.

This, the usual account of the novel, obscures some important

points. First, Tommo's reasons for leaving the Dolly are never adequately described; when set against his later activities, we may openly doubt the veracity of his account. Secondly, we may then wish to interrogate his motives more closely: he will be found to have constructed a narrative that consistently distorts events to cohere with his own desires and attitudes. Consequently, we begin to suspect whatever Tommo says about island life: most crucially, whether the islanders are the 'savages' that he suggests. However simple the plot of the novel may appear to be, either from previous acquaintance or critics' portrayals, *Typee* is a complex text.

#### 11) History: The United States and the Pacific

This point is reinforced once the novel's presentation of historical events has been considered. *Typee* focusses on the activities of the British, and especially the French in the Pacific; the novel is set during the annexation of the Marquesas by France in 1842. It can thus seem to downplay the U.S.'s implication. But although the U.S.A. didn't openly participate in the Pacific scramble for land until 1898 (when it swallowed the Phillipines and Guam, and annexed Hawaii), it was far from dormant; *Typee* should not be allowed to suggest that imperialism was only a European phenomenon.

It was in the economic field that the U.S. was pre-eminent, especially through its massive whaling fleet, the magnet which inexorably drew the Hawaiians into the U.S. orbit. Nevertheless, it also willingly used armed persuasion to ease the way of commerce, as when David Porter propitiously eliminated the British Pacific whalers in the War of 1812, or

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when between 1852 and 1854, Matthew Perry forced Japan to begin external trading. The U.S.A. was certainly not a passive, peaceful, onlooker in the scramble for markets and influence. So when I speak below of 'Western' involvement in the Pacific, I mean both U.S. and European, and that these powers, which liked ostensibly to parade their differences, were largely identical in core attitudes. As the texts show, all were motivated by the prospect of economic and imperial gain, and were united in the effort to spread the Christian gospel to the islands, even if national pride sometimes also intervened.

This is the context of *Typee's* analysis of Western involvement in the Marquesas. Nukuhiva (the island featured in *Typee*) was first 'discovered' by the American Joseph Ingraham in 1791. Although there followed certain discussion between the U.S.A., Britain, France and Spain as to 'ownership', until 1842 when Du Petit Thouars settled the matter, relations between the Western powers were largely amicable. For instance, a 'gentleman's agreement' between the London Missionary Society and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions resolved the leadership of the first Christian mission in 1832. Of course, this mildness may have been affirmed by the fact that unlike the Hawaiian islands or Tahiti, the Marquesas were deemed to be of little strategic value. Consequently, once their possession was settled, they remained a backwater in French Oceania, suffering steadily from depopulation and lack of investment (while providing a suitable base in the late twentieth-century for atomic weapons' research).

Yet this context, into which the narrative of *Typee* is inserted as a quintessential Western document, clearly obscures what this new contact meant for the indigenous population. In the 1790s, the Westerners



The Penguin  English Library

# HERMAN MELVILLE

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## TYPEE





encountered a coherent society of approximately 12,000 people living in twelve valleys, and sub-divided into forty groups, each with their own land and organisation. By 1850 they had reduced this 'find' to approximately 6,000 people with neither land, religion, organisation nor self-determination. The reader of *Typee* must bear these brutal facts constantly in mind when studying either the novel itself or the criticism that it has spawned.<sup>1</sup>

### iii) Previous Criticism

*Typee* has traditionally been seen as a 'record of experience', the fictionalised reminiscences of a literary rover about his adventures in a Pacific paradise. The most widely available version of the novel for the British reader is in the Penguin English Library, edited by George Woodcock.<sup>2</sup> Packaged with an 'attractive' picture of Tahiti by William Hodges on the cover, it reinforces any preconceptions that a prospective reader might have. Woodcock's introduction stresses the book's supposed interest in paradise. He argues that Melville idealises some aspects of *Typee* life in order to expose the latent brutalities of civilisation:

Having reduced the Marquesans from a relatively sophisticated people, with a life based on agriculture and producing massive works of communal labour, to a mere food-gathering tribe, Melville further distorts his narrative so as to enhance the romantic appeal of these children of nature ...

... Thus, fact is distorted to teach a certain didactic lesson, and in this sense we can see *Typee* as a real-life adventure turned into a fable whose purpose, like that of *Gulliver's Travels*, is to make us look at our own world by holding up the mirror of the world of innocence. (*Typee* ed, Woodcock pp. 22-24)

Woodcock clearly senses the novel's critical purpose, but commits the error which has afflicted nearly all interpreters of *Typee*; he assumes that Tommo is Melville's mouthpiece and sanctioned presence in the text. In

suggesting that the romanticisation he notices was Melville's tactic by which to expose the horrors of his own society, he overlooks the novel's far more rigorous analysis of language and politics. Moreover, he also devalues the use which Melville makes of other contemporary travel memoirs, saying that: 'the interpolated chapters of ethnological information and of polemic against missionaries are obviously written in as afterthoughts' (Typee ed. Woodcock p.24).

Woodcock is thus typical in directing attention away from Tommo's function to his 'experiences', and to what these supposedly show of the difference between Typee and American culture. Consider W.E.Sedgwick:

As we feel our way into the book, it comes over us more and more that we have all been to Typee, and that under one set or another of associations and images, it lies in all our minds. It is an embodiment of the world as we have all felt it in the glow and rapture of youthful love ... The laboured antithesis, then, which Melville drew between savage life and civilization goes deeper than differences of place and lies between youth and maturity, between the carefree vagabondage of mostly sensuous being and the rigors of intellectual and spiritual self-consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

or the much later J.Wenke:

In passing from the ship into the Typee valley, Tommo travels from the Western world of mind and history into the primitive world of unconsciousness and prehistory ... Tommo is Melville's first character who encounters cultural relativism.<sup>4</sup>

Few critics seem to have grappled with the deeper issues raised by Tommo. J.P.Joswick, for instance, is sceptical that the book is a broadside against imperialism:

Tommo sees that the sustaining myths of the western world deteriorate to a point where they in fact endanger any hope of community, but [also] that the myths of Edenic innocence and of his own 'Adamic' impulse fail to offer a corrective standard for civilization.<sup>5</sup>

Because of his post-structuralist bias, Joswick becomes preoccupied by apparent inconsistencies in the novel, and dissolves his analysis, imprisoning Melville in an isolated aesthetic realm:



A man enters Eden still demanding his historical identity and consequently Eden is destroyed; but if the demands of identity are not asserted, Eden swallows the man in a hypnogogic trance in which history and self are destroyed. By displacing the origin, however, and decentering the two structures, the way of mediation embodies forth a new man, the fictive, pseudonymic artist, who in a mnemonic narrative can define himself as the sign of difference and of oppositions without resolution, (Joswick p.353)

Equally dispiriting is T.W.Herbert, whose *Marquesan Encounters* is the most influential book on *Typee* to have been published this decade. Despite its exciting analysis of the sources Melville used, and of the text of *Typee*, it too eventually sees the novel as a Romantic 'artistic' production, in contrast to the Calvinist and Enlightenment 'political' sources. This is to duck *Typee's* analysis of discourse.<sup>6</sup> Even Robert Clark, who focusses clearly on language issues, sees *Typee* as an early work, and so undervalues its potency. He returns to the traditional estimation of Tommo as: 'a naive experiencer/perceiver of events/facts [who] makes clear distinctions between what he has observed and the deductions that may be drawn from it'. He then reassociates Tommo and Melville, a 'cultural imperialist' whose mission is 'to convert his readers to the true religion of nature'.<sup>7</sup>

Critics have thus persistently mistaken *Typee's* preoccupations. What if the 'experience' of Tommo may not actually be central to the novel? Could the book be interested as much in the function of the narrator, as in his record of events? Could it be attempting to illustrate processes of cultural hegemony and historical legitimation, as much as weakly to decry the fate of some Pacific islanders? Could it, by studying the nature of both 'primitive' and 'civilized' signifying systems, be suggesting that oppressed peoples may actually be able to participate in the debate about their future, rather than having to play the silent object in a cultural

sentence over which they have no control? These central concerns have been overlooked, and consequently the novel's power has been denied.

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### The Narrator

As Tommo has usually been seen as the educated 'experiencer' of captivity among a cannibal tribe, and their (balanced) eulogiser in narrative, his descriptions of the Typee paradise have been largely taken at face value:

There were some spots in that sunny vale where they would frequently resort to decorate themselves with garlands of flowers. To have seen them reclining beneath the shadows of one of the beautiful groves; the ground about them strewn with freshly gathered buds and blossoms, employed in weaving chaplets and necklaces, one would have thought that all the train of Flora had gathered together to keep a festival in honor of their mistress. (7152)

But his happy acquiescence in this somewhat improbable Western classical imagery should warn the reader that something more complex is happening. Tommo's role as narrator has been consistently overlooked, particularly over the last twenty years, with a critical loss of interest in character and motivation. He is the person who specifically shapes events for the audience. In this analysis I shall concentrate not on his experiences, but on his nature and his function in the text as distinct from the author.

#### 1) His nature

Tommo quickly establishes a solicitous stance towards his audience which he maintains throughout the book: 'Six months at sea! Yes, reader,

as I live, six months out of sight of land'(T 11). In Chapter 4, for instance, he remarks of the Typees 'this is a peculiarity to which I shall hereafter have occasion to allude' (T 35), and also comments that 'the glen of Tior will furnish a curious illustration' (T 39) of the local topography. In Chapter 16, he states that he 'cannot forbear relating' certain things, and that he 'should have mentioned' them previously (T 145). In chapter 17, he says, somewhat pompously: 'these I believe are the established phrases' (T 149). Likewise, in Chapter 34, he notices: 'the circumstances connected with my most unexpected escape may be very briefly stated' (T 291), and in the Appendix, he remarks that 'it is needless to rehearse' in detail events in Tahiti in 1843 (T 293).

These examples do not just illustrate Tommo's awareness of (and shared knowledge with) his audience. The stock phrases indicate that his narration is consciously directed towards an audience which is a restricted group within society, a readership that supported missionary organisations and that was very conscious of its own status. Many other comments also illustrate this point:

Although I could not yet avoid yielding in a great measure to the general languor, still at times I contrived to shake off the spell, and to appreciate the beauty of the scene around me, (T p18-19)

Here, Tommo differentiates himself from the rest of the crew, and establishes his superior 'moral' quality by resisting idleness and absorbing himself in cultural appreciation. Similarly, he comments confidently on the beach-comber, the 'genuine South-Sea vagabond', exhibiting a low opinion of this 'most extraordinary individual' (T 22), a white man turned 'native'. Again, he justifies his desertion from the ship by asking what else could an honourable man do in the circumstances?

It behoves me, for the sake of my own character, to offer some explanation of my conduct.



When I entered the *Dolly*, I signed as a matter of course the ship's articles ... I was of course bound to fulfill the agreement. But in all contracts, if one party fail to perform his share of the compact, is not the other virtually absolved from his liability? Who is there who will not answer in the affirmative? ... I at once made up my mind to leave her (730-33)

Likewise, he demonstrates his paternalism to both women and islanders by forcing one into the role of concubine and the other into that of slave:

The first day after Fayaway's emancipation I had a delightful little party on the lake - the damsel, Kory-Kory, and myself. My zealous body-servant brought from the house a calabash of poee-poe, half a dozen young cocoa-nuts - stripped of their husks - three pipes, as many yams, and me on his back a part of the way. Something of a load; but Kory-Kory was a strong man for his size, and by no means brittle in the spine. (7159)

The irony in the term 'emancipation' is crushing; Tommo's narrative is thoroughly partisan and exclusive. Indeed, he consistently discriminates against the islanders, he romanticises his descriptions, he is frequently emotional, and he is governed by a wish to categorise experience in accordance with his preconceived scheme.

For instance, despite his unequivocally good treatment in the valley, Tommo usually calls the Typees 'savages' (7 133, 144, 172), perhaps preferring this generic term to the slightly less loaded one 'native', because it offers a better contrast with his own 'civilisation'. This basic tendency to situate and categorise is much more significant in defining the Typees for the reader than his rarer direct outbursts. When Tommo is constantly 'amused' by the Typees, finding their lifestyle 'truly remarkable', 'striking', and 'singular', he attempts to allow them no existence on their own terms (7 196, 198, 199).

Another instance of such manipulation is his continual use of romanticised rhetoric. Even during the flight from the *Dolly*, Tommo stops to admire the view, and turns his escape narrative into picturesque:

We must have been more than three thousand feet above the level of the sea, and the scenery viewed from this height was magnificent.

The lonely bay of Nukuheva, dotted here and there with the black hulls of

the vessels comprising the French squadron, lay reposing at the base of a circular range of elevations, whose verdant sides, perforated with deep glens or diversified with smiling valleys, formed altogether the loveliest view I ever beheld, and were I to live a hundred years, I should never forget the feeling of admiration which I then experienced. (754)

Similarly, in his moment of greatest danger during the second escape at the end of the book, Tommo deliberately sentimentalises the scene:

Clasping my hands together, I looked imploringly at Marheyo, and moved towards the now almost deserted beach. The tears were in the old man's eyes, but neither he nor Kory-Kory attempted to hold me, and I soon reached the Kanaka, who had anxiously watched my movements; the rowers pulled in as near as they dared to the edge of the surf; I gave one parting embrace to Fayaway, who seemed speechless with sorrow, and the next instant I found myself safe in the boat ... (7289)

The tendency is most noticeable, however, in the many descriptions of Fayaway, Tommo's Typee sweetheart, in which the Pacific islander is transformed from a living woman into the stuff of dreams:

With a wild exclamation of delight, she disengaged from her person the ample robe of tappa which was knotted over her shoulder (for the purpose of shielding her from the sun), and spreading it out like a sail, stood erect with upraised arms in the head of the canoe. We American sailors pride ourselves upon straight, clean spars, but a prettier little mast than Fayaway made was never shipped aboard of any craft. (7160)

In each of the above cases, reality is consciously shaped by rhetoric according to the dictates of sentimentality, and as a result, facts are distorted. The constant tendency to categorise according to a preconceived conceptual outlook is fundamental; Tommo's most characteristic quality is his refusal to consider the Typees and their island on any other than his own (elitist American) terms. He demonstrates this both in his unvarying tone and expressions, and in fully formed statements:

The entire body of my savage valet, covered all over with representations of birds and fishes, and a variety of most unaccountable-looking creatures, suggested to me the idea of a pictorial museum of natural history, or an illustrated copy of 'Goldsmith's Animated Nature'. (7103)

This description, strikingly reminiscent of pictures of Charles Wilson

Peale's museum (which had been a great hit in the U.S.A.), is a characteristic manifestation of Tommo's general cultural attitude.<sup>8</sup>

Only once while he is in the valley is Tommo presented with something that he feels he can 'read' without effort:

The tattooing on his back in particular attracted my attention. The artist employed must indeed have excelled in his profession. Traced along the course of the spine was accurately delineated the slender, tapering, and diamond-checked shaft of the beautiful 'artu' tree. (T 162)

Tommo's pleasure at being able to employ directly his own artistic precepts is, however, misplaced. Marnoo is a virtual half-caste, an equivocal figure for the Typees, who almost alone of their race is permitted to travel at will to every valley of the island. While this gives him privilege it also makes him slightly suspicious to the Typees. Ironically, by responding so warmly to Marnoo, Tommo is touched with this suspicion. Moreover, as it is Marnoo on whom the Typees rely for information about the activities of the imperialist French, Tommo also links himself to these activities (T 169). Even this relationship testifies to Tommo's endemic cultural imperialism; this imperialism is the dominant tone of his narration. Under it, prejudice and destruction are denied, and replaced with romanticised platitudes. By ignoring Tommo's loaded rhetoric, critics have repeatedly seen these platitudes as evidence of a Typee 'paradise'.

#### ii) Tommo's Representativeness as Narrator

Tommo's elitist characteristics are not arbitrary, they cohere with those displayed in contemporary literature about Pacific life (in itself typical of general nineteenth-century elitist writing). If we recognise



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Tommo's kinship with other writers of the period we can appreciate his function as narrator in the text. So, let us compare these attitudes demonstrated in other records of Western reactions to the Pacific islands with the evidence provided above about Tommo. I shall consider three books known to have been used in the composition of *Typee*: C.S.Stewart *A Visit to the South Seas*, W.Ellis *Polynesian Researches*, and D.Porter *Journal of a Cruise made to the Pacific Ocean*.<sup>2</sup>

Charles Stewart, a staunch Calvinist, was sent by the American Board to the Hawaiian mission in 1830 as a special agent to the Marquesas, to assess the state of the people there. As a result of his record (published as the *Visit*), a mission was established in 1831 under W.P.Alexander and Richard Armstrong. It was an abject failure, but Stewart retained his prestige as: 'the premier American spokesman for the work of the missions in Polynesia' (Herbert p.56). William Ellis, a Briton, was the representative of the London Missionary Society at their project on Tahiti. It was partly because of his fame that Stewart was sent to the Pacific to become an American propagandist as able as his British counterpart. David Porter was the U.S. naval commander who wrought havoc on British shipping during the War of 1812. His destruction of the British whaling industry in the Pacific ensured: 'an American dominance that continued until the industry itself collapsed' (Herbert p.79). While refitting in the Marquesas in 1812 he felt so threatened by the Typees that he led an attack on their valley. After the first sortie was embarrassingly repulsed, he succeeded in the second only by marching over the mountains to take the Typees by surprise. The savagery with which he laid the valley waste was unparalleled among a people where two or three deaths in battle with neighbours were regarded as heavy losses.

Like Tommo, each Western traveller recoils from the islanders. For instance, Stewart comments:

Though somewhat hardened to scenes which I am obliged to witness without the power to control, I am more and more disgusted with the nakedness, and a hundred other of the odious appurtenances of heathenism forced on us at every turn, (Stewart p.309)

Similarly, Ellis refers to the indigenous religion as 'a system of idolatry ... a most affecting exhibition of imbecility, absurdity, and degradation', and the taboo system as tantamount to witchcraft, 'debasing these children of nature'. (Ellis pp. 219, 233) Again, Porter remarks:

We are going among a people much addicted to thieving, treacherous in their proceedings, whose conduct is governed only by fear, and regulated by views to their interest. We must put nothing in their power.' (Porter p.6)

Each of the travellers thus uses his text, like Tommo, to suggest that it is the islanders who impress their standards on the Westerners, not as it actually is, the Westerners who impose their categories on the islanders.

Moreover, again like Tommo, each author is clearly writing for an audience whose assumptions and class solidarity he shares. Stewart, for instance, expresses a deeply rooted piety in a way that is calculated to ring true with the many supporters of his mission at home:

O that some far happier bark might speedily be seen from their shores, bearing to them that which is no dream nor 'cunningly devised fable', but the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation. (Stewart p.221)

In this he is matched by his British colleague, Ellis:

In the evening several of the Missionaries met for social worship, and with this sacred exercise we closed our first Sabbath in the Society Islands, under a deep impression of the advantages of Christianity, and the pleasing effects which we had that day witnessed, of Divine influence over the hearts of the most profligate idolaters. (Ellis p. 159)

And added to his piety, Stewart also stresses his belief in: 'the high toned principles and spirit of Americanism' (Stewart p.31), and in the advantages of an education which will permit the islanders to be perfectly patronised:

Their grimaces of detestation and deadly hatred to their enemies ... and pantomimic representations of the battle, and the discharge of muskets, and effect of the shot, were quite amusing. (Stewart p.223)

(Here he enjoys as theatre their representation of a battle with Westerners.) Porter, too, riddles his text with American nationalism, 'rationalism', and class bias. He says that he writes it 'for the improvement and information of my son' (overtones of the Chesterfieldian Melvilles again?), and contends that it records achievements that out-ranked those of the (British) explorers Anson and Cook (Porter pp. 56, 146). Despite employing apparently level tones and neutral expressions, the language of all of these books encodes the common assumptions of an aggressively expansionist, elitist society.

Each book also displays that addiction to the romantic and picturesque which characterised Tommo's narrative. Stewart says of the cruise out:

At night, the scene was particularly fine ... Our ships careening through and upon the heaving billows, dashing beds of snowy foam far around, and leaving a broad wake behind, as they sank and rose with the swellings of the sea, - the bright gleaming in the moon beams of the little sail out, while the raked spars above, in the deep rolls of the vessel, swept widely and swiftly in black and clearly defined lines against the sky. (Stewart p.27)

Once among the islands, he is fairly entranced by their beauty, seeing them as 'more like a highly wrought fancy sketch for a romance of the stage, than a scene in nature' (Stewart p.280). Again, Ellis remarks:

The scene was enlivened by the waterfall on the mountain's side, the cataract that chafed along its rocky bed in the recesses of the ravine, or the stream that slowly wound its way through the fertile and cultivated valleys, and the whole was surrounded by the white-crested waters of the Pacific, rolling their waves of foam in splendid majesty upon the coral reefs, or dashing in spray against its broken shore. (Ellis pp.144-145)

Only Porter limits his enthusiasm for the landscape itself, though more than the missionaries he romanticises the inhabitants:

Let the philosopher mourn over the depravity, as he may call it, of human nature; let him express his horror, that civilized man can, for a moment, be



lured by the charms of a savage; let the moralist, from his closet, preach the charms of virtue and deformity of vice; still I shall not let fall the curtain; the veil shall still be raised and nature expressed. The charms of wild uncultivated nature are not the less admired, and the rose of the wilderness is not less beautiful than that of the parterre. (Porter p.88)

Here he parades the attitude which underpins all these comments; he refuses to respond to what he sees on its own terms, turning it instead into the stuff of his tourist's fantasy. None of the travellers is willing to attempt to understand or express the complexity of the Pacific. Each of them concentrates instead on conforming it to their own categories.

On this evidence, elitist memoirs of Pacific travels are characterised by recoil from the indigenous inhabitants, the transformation of these people and their land into picturesque playgrounds, and the use of texts as ways to categorise and control representations of island life in exclusively Western terms; they are primary evidence about cultural attitudes. Because of the wide readership eager for their books, and because of the common values which they articulated, these memoirs were themselves the weapons of imperialism, just as much as warships, missionary compounds or trading stations. The fact that Tommo's narration accords with theirs in all particulars from narrative voice to articulation of attitudes is of primary significance in assessing his role in *Typee*. When he says in the first chapter of the novel:

The Marquesas! What strange visions of outlandish things does the very name spirit up! Naked houris - cannibal banquets - groves of cocoa-nut - coral reefs - tattooed chiefs - and bamboo temples; sunny valleys planted with bread-fruit-trees - carved canoes dancing on the flashing blue waters - savage woodlands guarded by horrible idols *heathenish rites and human sacrifices*. (T 13, emphasis as in text)

the whole point is that for most readers this was precisely what the name 'Marquesas' signified. Tommo, aware of the stereotypes and preconceptions,

sets out to fulfil the readers' expectations, modifying them only to make them (in his terms) more 'accurate' due to his 'first-hand' experience. As the thesis develops, it will become clear that I feel the narrators use sources such as the missionary memoirs to do more than merely establish their elitist presence. These sources are constituent features of the narrators' narratives; at one level, it is they who marshal them. As will be seen below, Tommo, the first of the narrators does this, but it is a more developed trait in his successors. At this point, I am concerned first to establish the partisan nature of Tommo's voice, and the fact that his narrative is distinct from Melville's larger text.

To place this analysis more closely: <sup>that</sup> Western attitudes are typically governed by the attempt to 'situate' and thereby control others is part of the phenomenon called 'orientalism' by Edward Said. Said quotes Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* 'They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented' to propose his argument that for centuries Western scholars, writers, and politicians created an 'Orient' on their own terms, denying the right to the local people to speak for themselves or to challenge these imposed perceptions. This is precisely the approach displayed by Stewart, Ellis, Porter, and Tommo to the Pacific islanders. In emphasising the role of the written word in popularising and reinforcing these impressions, and in attempting to hide the violence and bias of the categorisation process, Said's analysis of encyclopaedia entries, travels, novels, and works of anthropology sensitizes us to the strategies deployed by these Pacific authors, and stresses that Tommo characteristically acts as a typical travel memoirist and orientalist.<sup>10</sup>

Tommo 'informs' his readers about life in Typee, entertains them with his romanticised savages, dangerous exploits and picturesque

descriptions, and terrorises them with the fear of cannibalism or the tattoo. To anyone who enjoyed reading the books in the series in which Typee was first published (Murray's *Home and Colonial Library*), the typically sub-divided table of contents with which the volume was prefaced reassured them that they would be in the hands of a dependable, conventional narrator. Typee's inclusion in Mudie's Library until 1860 suggests that its first readers found little to discomfit them in Tommo's narrative stance; there was nothing here to shock the young ladies, or to jeopardise Typee's circulation figures.<sup>11</sup> Tommo perfectly expresses the aspirations and attitudes of contemporary elite society as it considered the Pacific, he is not the naive 'experiencer' of some critics.<sup>12</sup>

#### iii) Tommo and Melville

Tommo's discourse marks his narrative out as a political tool of elitist society. His function as narrator is thus to represent the values of that sponsoring society within the text. But how, then, can Tommo's narrative have been written by Herman Melville, who I have suggested was alienated from the attitudes of his family and class? This question is central to an adequate reading of Typee. Bluntly, it is clear that Tommo's narrative is to be understood as not 'written' by Melville, but by Tommo (who is after all the narrator); it is the much larger text Typee which was written by Melville. It is necessary to distinguish between this larger text and Tommo's narrative.

Tommo immediately advertises his control over his own narrative. The Preface, for instance, proclaims his supposedly honest relation of



facts, stating that he has been encouraged to publish for the entertainment of: 'fire-side people' 'who are less familiar than the sailor with a life of adventure' (T 9).

There are many other examples of Tommo laying open the unfolding of his story: 'But to return to my narrative' (T 33); 'the result of these inquiries I will now state, in order that the ensuing narrative may be the better understood' (T 34); 'But to return ... I have mentioned' (T 38); 'I may here remark by the way' (T 64); 'I will not recount every hair breadth escape' (T 83); 'I may as well here enter into a little description of it and its inhabitants' (T 101); 'this picture is no fancy sketch' (T 106); 'But I have omitted to describe' (T 107); 'their singular conduct ... imparted to subsequent events an additional mystery' (T 129); 'these now appear so ludicrous that I cannot forbear relating them' (T 145); 'But subsequent events proved' (T 154); 'if the reader has not observed ere this' (T 161); 'as I believe that no description of its manufacture has ever been given, I shall here state what I know regarding it' (T 175); 'the curious ceremony I am about to describe was observed' (T 207); 'the contrast exhibited between the Marquesans and other islanders of the Pacific in this respect, is worthy of being noticed' (T 226); 'I have but one thing more to add' (T 234); 'the reader will ere long have reason to suspect' (T 240); 'I think I must enlighten the reader' (T 246). - All of these remarks are not simply relaxed banter between Tommo and his reader, but evidence of the way Tommo shapes his own narrative.

Indeed, Tommo as a literate son of the elite is fully aware of the process of narrative composition, and of how texts influence their readers. He comments, for instance, on the way that missionary memoirs are 'calculated to leave upon the reader's mind an impression' (T 200 my

emphasis). Again, he remarks that footnotes can be used to give an air of verisimilitude (T 183 207), and recognises their potential as a ploy with which to reinforce his own authority:

Accounts like these are sometimes copied into English and American journals. They lead the reader to infer that the arts and customs of civilized life are rapidly refining the natives of the Sandwich Islands. But let no one be deceived by these accounts, (T 222)

On all this evidence, it is clear that Tommo's narrative can be treated as a discrete entity; it establishes its own boundaries, advertises its own processes, and by means of its characteristic voice and attitudes is distinguishable from other elements within the text of *Typee*.

Hence if Tommo is only the narrator of *Typee*, this must mean that like his voice, his narrative is consciously constructed by Melville. The voice is so composed from stock expressions and attitudes that it is understood to be typical. The narrative is so constantly self-referring that it is recognised as an artefact. Together, voice and narrative form a whole, a representative presence of the contemporary elitist audience. Authorial 'control' is thus removed to a deeper textual level than may at first be apparent. In a sense, Tommo becomes a character and his narrative one of a series of sub-plots, within the larger text, *Typee*, the product of Melville the author.

This larger text is the subject of the later sections of this chapter, but I shall end this discussion of Tommo by noticing the interest he has aroused in some previous critics:

Tommo therefore narrates from two perspectives - then and now. His present moods - nostalgia, anger [at the missionaries], objective observance [of life in *Typee*], and humor - frequently intrude upon the narrative which describes his actual states of mind while he was in *Typee*. The result shows clearly two views of *Typee* and emphasises the changing subjective quality of that entire experience for Tommo.

Here W.B.Dillingham focusses on the effect produced by the time-lag between the events on the island and their writing as narrative. Commenting on *An Artist in the Rigging*, Milton Stern suggests that not only is this tantamount to acknowledging a split perspective within the unitary narrator, but that *Typee* actually has 'two' narrators (although he fails to specify who these actually are).<sup>13</sup>

Such observations must be pushed to their conclusion. Commentators still seem to be preoccupied by Tommo's 'experiences'. Ever since C.R.Anderson's researches in the nineteen-thirties, it has been evident that these experiences in *Typee* are very different from Melville's own on Nukuhiva.<sup>14</sup> Critics have persistently argued that Tommo is a fictionalisation of the young Melville, and so have spoken confidently of Melville's quest for paradise in the Pacific as related in *Typee*, while there is no support in the text of the novel for such a reading. On the contrary, Tommo is shown to be a fictionalised persona, a proud member of the elite classes, and the producer of a narrative which is only one of the strands of *Typee* as a whole.

Anyone who has read Janet Giltrow's article 'Speaking Out: Travel and Structure in Herman Melville's Early Narratives', should already be alert to the similarities between Tommo's narrative and contemporary travel memoirs.<sup>15</sup> But Giltrow overlooks the fact that neither the travel memoirists as a group, nor Tommo in this case, were 'naive' in what and how they wrote. My point is that Tommo, like them, uses the genre to fabricate a version of reality that accords with his political principles and representative status; and that this process is exposed by Melville. Such genre manipulation coheres with the elitist understanding of literature as an ideological tool.



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*Typee*; the text as ground for struggle

The interrogation of Tommo's function in *Typee* suggests that although all events and descriptions in the novel are mediated by the narrator, because he is himself a 'limited' presence, it may be possible to discern dissenting voices in the text. However, no statement is made which is directly attributable to the author. Rather, familiarisation with Tommo's distinctive rhetoric and acquaintance with his strategems, reveals that these are being consistently destabilised. By tuning in to Tommo's voice, one can become aware of the 'rustle' beneath his language, and in this rustle is found the fullness of *Typee*.

1) Melville's subversion of Tommo's narrative through other narratives

Tommo, the typical Western narrator, constantly wishes to categorise the islanders as 'savages', and 'cannibals', but even within the very allusions which further the narrative argument, Melville repeatedly undermines this aggressively elitist project.

A literary forbear to whom Tommo is attached, especially in the early stages of his narration, is the Milton of *Paradise Lost*, and behind that, the Bible. Critics have recognised Tommo's verbal indebtedness to both of these texts, but have not extended their enquiry to consider the function of these references in *Typee*.<sup>16</sup>

Tommo first uses a Miltonic parallel in Chapter Four, when he says:

When the inhabitants of some sequestered island first descry the 'big canoe' of the European rolling through the blue waters towards their shores, they rush down to the beach in crowds, and with open arms stand ready to embrace the strangers. Fatal embrace! They fold to their bosom the vipers whose sting is destined to poison all their joys; and the instinctive feeling of

love within their breast is soon converted into the bitterest hate, (739)

Here Tommo proposes that the islanders are the ignorant inhabitants of Paradise, who like Adam and Eve unknowingly hasten their own deaths by welcoming the 'civilized' intruder to their land. This comment reinforces the conviction of someone who is in control of his expression and categorisation, and who is confident in invoking his stereotypes.

Yet in the next Miltonic reference, it is actually Tommo and Toby who are the serpents - wittingly or not, Tommo has cast himself in the role of Satan, so exploding the sub-text of the first quotation:

Instead however of walking along its ridge, where we should have been in full view of the natives in the vales beneath, and at a point where they could easily intercept us were they so inclined, we cautiously advanced on one side, crawling on our hands and knees, and glided, much in the fashion of a couple of serpents, (752)

Tommo's later comment:

I may here remark by the way - what I subsequently learned - that all the islands of Polynesia enjoy the reputation, in common with the Hibernian isle, of being free from the presence of any vipers; though whether Saint Patrick ever visited them, is a question I shall not attempt to decide, (764)

is a first indication of his incomplete control over his narrative. His pompous tone acknowledges his sense of threat.

Yet he tries to regain his poise, by presenting himself and Toby as the primal couple, Adam and Eve:

The whole landscape seemed one unbroken solitude, the interior of the island having apparently been untenanted since the morning of creation; and as we advanced through this wilderness, our voices sounded strangely in our ears, as though human accents had never before disturbed the fearful silence of the place, interrupted only by the low murmurings of distant waterfalls, (758)

Despite this confidence, he is again caught out, being observed looking into Typee just as Satan looks into Eden (*Paradise Lost* IV 205):

I chanced to push aside a branch, and by so doing suddenly disclosed to my view a scene which even now I can recall with all the vividness of the first impression. Had a glimpse of the gardens of Paradise been revealed to me I could scarcely have been more ravished with the sight, (764)

Clearly unaware of this role-reversal, Tommo eventually hurls himself into the valley in an ironic parody of Satan's leap over the wall of the Garden:

Uttering one comprehensive ejaculation of prayer, I inclined myself over towards the abyss, and after one breathless instant fell with a crash into the tree ... (781)

He then proceeds to his most startling reference to *Paradise Lost*:

They were a boy and a girl, slender and graceful, and completely naked, with the exception of a slight girdle of bark, from which depended at opposite points two of the russet leaves of the bread-fruit tree. An arm of the boy, half screened from sight by her wild tresses, was thrown about the neck of the girl, while with the other he held one of her hands in his, (786)

Here Tommo clearly casts the escapees in the role of God discovering the recalcitrant Adam and Eve. This, though, is a crass inversion of the actual situation, for not only do Tommo and Toby represent evil rather than good, they are also effectively the captives of the young Typees. It is not their prerogative to judge anything.

This last instance, more obviously than any of the others, exposes the deep processes at work in the text. In evoking Milton and claiming to be Adam and Eve or God, Tommo is creating his narrative in his usual way; he feels that the references help him to categorise the Typees as ignorant savages, and so retain his dominance over his story by bolstering his supposed position of power. However, his Miltonic references undermine his own activity; he is unaware of the full effects of his actions.

By occupying the interstices of Tommo's argument, Melville as author has 'hi-jacked' Tommo's allusions and alerted the sensitive reader to the narrator's real position. In showing that because of his Western arrogance, Tommo has ignorantly portrayed himself as Satan, not God, Melville has used the references to circumscribe Tommo's authority. Consequently, he has established a recognisable dialectic between Tommo's pretensions to control, and the reality of the island which disputes this



control. Although he has not openly rebelled against his narrator, Tommo has been undercut by the activity of the author. The text of *Typee* testifies to all of these processes.

The series of references to Milton is, moreover, not the only example of its kind in *Typee*, just the most extensive. Another significant instance of the same manoeuvre is when Tommo recalls the memory of Robinson Crusoe, first hoarding his provisions in a way that parallels the Englishman, then specifically referring to him: 'Robinson Crusoe could not have been more startled at the footprint in the sand than we were at this unwelcome discovery' (*T* pp. 57, 58). The irony here is that while Tommo sees Crusoe as the archetypal Westerner who brings 'order' from 'chaos', Defoe's hero is ship-wrecked because he is under the judgment of God. Melville thus manages to show that Tommo and Toby as representative figures are equally condemned.

Similarly, when Tommo appeals to the conventions of gothic novels, he is again undercut by Melville as author. A repeated refrain in much of the first section of the book is the question 'Typee or Happar' - felt to be crucial as they believe the Typees, unlike the Happers, are cannibals. Set among the romanticised landscape of the interior of the island, this questioning recalls similar agonising in novels such as Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* (1799), and reaches its climax when they are actually confronted by some natives: 'Typee or Happar? A frightful death at the hands of the fiercest of cannibals, or a kindly reception from a gentler race of savages?' (*T* 84). Tommo's gothic resort to self-interrogation is an appeal to the sympathy of his novel reading audience. Ironically, however, it advertises his misrepresentation of facts, for in believing that he can simplify island culture into the single question 'Typee or

Happar?', Tommo again demonstrates his characteristically Western tendency to pejorative categorisation and the will to power. Moreover, he also alerts us to the studied fictionality of his narrative, and his own circumscribed position within it.<sup>17</sup>

Each of these cases above reveals Melville's guiding hand behind the surface presence of Tommo's narrative. In juxtaposing Tommo's apprehension of other narratives with his own view of their significance, Melville exposes his narrator's latent value-system. Crucially, this is what he also does with that other genre which we have already considered; the missionary/travel memoir. Far from these being incorporated as life-like padding, Melville actively employs the memoirs in the production of his text; his reaction to them highlights the conscious way that he formed the hidden argument of *Typee*. But it is a commonplace of Melville criticism that these accounts were included as 'padding'.<sup>18</sup> This is tantamount to arguing that Melville could not construct a text without the 'aid' of previous authors, and is both a devaluation of his skill as a writer, and a fundamental misconception of his compositional process. Melville's reference to other authors was not arbitrary - it allowed him to scrutinise whole generic traditions, and thus gave his work a huge potential influence in any resultant debate.

In Stewart's *Visit*, we noted that he both recoiled from the islanders and romanticised the landscape. When combined, these points suggest someone under stress. By projecting an image of security, the romanticisation compensates for Stewart's horror at having to live among the infidel. Yet, unfortunately for him, Stewart also seems to have

genuinely fallen in love with the Pacific. His reaction to this rather un-Protestant occurrence when supposedly on the Lord's business is exactly the same; he turns the islands into a paradise (without islanders), picturing them through a Western frame of reference: 'Tempe itself can scarce boast anything of the kind in equal beauty' (Stewart p.349). It is thus arguable that the *Visit* is the record of Stewart's attempt to dominate what he experiences. Naming the islanders 'savages', or the place itself 'Tempe', exhibits the typical Western tendency to categorise. But in the Marquesas, in contrast to the other islands, this project is unavailable to Stewart. Here the islanders have so far successfully avoided all missionary attempts, and it transpires that he has come at this stage only in order to 'view natives wild' and so bolster his confidence for endeavours elsewhere. The Marquesas are a sort of constant in a vast cultural chemistry experiment:

To make a just comparison between the condition and prospects of immortal beings still in all the darkness of paganism, and others - most emphatically and truly 'bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh' - upon whose characters and condition the enlightening and regenerating influences of Christianity have been made, in a greater or less degree, to bear. (Stewart p.213)

So the *Visit* is not all that it may at first appear. Instead of being the diary of a successful exploratory missionary journey to the Pacific, it is the record of growing individual discomfort and creeping doubt about the very nature of the missionary endeavour. The only person over whom Stewart seems to have more than an illusionary control (the wife who is left at home dutifully to await his return) ultimately evades him by dying. In this light, the *Visit* is the record of scarcely disguised failure.

Porter's *Journal* is a similarly equivocal text. While he is typically bullish in all his comments about the Typees, bringing to bear the full



power of his American elitist mind on their condition, the authoritative credentials of his record are undercut by its final pages. Here he describes the capture of his ship by the British, and it suddenly transpires that his *Journal* has been an elaborate defence plea - a rhetorical attempt to impress the American public with his achievements, and so to reduce their dismay at his ultimate failure.<sup>12</sup>

In each of these cases, analysis of the narratives reveals that they are motivated by forces not immediately declared. Although their authors attempt to disguise this, their texts cannot conceal it from the reader. This is equally true of *Typee*.

In Chapter 5, Tommo unwittingly reveals his main reason for deserting the *Dolly*. Rather than simply fleeing bad treatment, as he attempts to claim, it is because he likes the idea of being a Byronic rover, the undoubted king of Paradise:

The idea pleased me greatly ... Why, it was really refreshing even to think of it; and so I straightway fell to picturing myself seated beneath a cocoa-nut tree on the brow of the mountain, with a cluster of plantains within easy reach, (743)

Having ascertained as much as he can about the island (a typically Western preparation), and decided that it will be an easy matter to escape and become a gentleman of leisure, he picks his companion (the lower class Man Friday), and sets off. Almost immediately, they are shocked at what they find: 'here we were disappointed ... this was a most unlooked-for discovery' (755). And so a pattern of encouragement and reversal is established that persists to the end of the novel.

The latter stages of this pattern will be considered below, but its key elements are already clear: once Tommo has had a set-back, he repudiates the reality of the island, unable to believe that he could have

been wrong, and attempts to 'redefine' it. Thus despite finding that there is very little food on Nukuheva, he tries to suppress this knowledge, and reassert control regardless: 'the sight that now greeted us was one that will ever be vividly impressed upon my mind ... as soon as I had satisfied my curiosity ...' (T 60). This succeeds for a while, only to be reversed when they are confronted by a huge waterfall: 'as one after another the treacherous roots yielded to my grasp, and fell into the torrent, my heart sunk within me' (T 78). Nothing daunted, when he has survived his descent Tommo again exerts his power to categorise the island as sublime:

Here and there [were] narrow irregular ledges, supporting a shallow soil, on which grew a variety of bushes and trees, whose bright verdure contrasted beautifully with the foamy waters that flowed between them, (T 79)

*Typee*, then, charts a series of reversals. The island (and later its inhabitants) all refuse to submit lightly to Tommo's attempt to 'name' them. As a result, his confidence is undermined, and his pretensions to control are revealed and challenged. Tommo attempts to use the Pacific travels to bolster his elitist voice and representative function, but because these are ambiguous records, Melville actually succeeds in destabilising the narrator. For the sensitive reader this strategy (with the manipulation of gothic novel convention and Miltonic reference) exposes Tommo's class-based motivation and his political conception of his narrative. *Typee* demonstrates that Melville is constantly aware of the possibilities of texts as political and strategic entities.

A second conclusion also follows if this reading is correct; we must acknowledge that *Typee* is evidence of Melville's disagreement with Tommo's stance, and hence further testimony to his dissent from the American elite orthodoxy. This is not an abstruse argument - writers have always used

their predecessors' productions as mirrors with which to enliven their own works, and it was an established strategy in the nineteenth-century. Melville, however, elevates it to new levels of consciousness and subtlety in the way that he employs it against his own supposed agent, and so severely criticises the values of his contemporary society.<sup>20</sup>

ii) Other characters as a focus for dissent

Melville's subversion of his narrator is not limited to circumscribing Tommo's references; he also exploits Tommo's own prejudice against other characters. Again, this clarifies Tommo's representative attitudes, Melville's disagreement with them, and the possibilities for their eventual refutation.

Before embarking on his adventure, Tommo recognises that he needs a companion, and chooses Toby not just because he thinks him dependable:

Toby, like myself, had evidently moved in a different sphere of life, and his conversation at times betrayed this ... There was much even in the appearance of Toby calculated to draw me towards him, for while the greater part of the crew were as coarse in person as in mind, Toby was endowed with a remarkably prepossessing exterior. (744)

Although not accredited with intelligence, Toby is obviously felt to be of high enough class to accompany the elitist narrator. The quotation illustrates the arrogant way in which he is invariably treated.

Once in the mountains, Tommo tries to assert authority over Toby by taking charge of their joint provisions. Yet as we have seen, Tommo's mood now begins to change, and his oscillation between fits of depression countered by attempts to regain control influences his attitude to Toby just as much as it does his attitude to the island itself. Toby's is here



the voice of the pragmatic commoner: 'if you choose rather to perish with hunger in one of these soppy caverns, I for one prefer to chance a bold descent into the valley, and risk the consequences' (T 73). But Tommo haughtily proclaims: 'since we had deemed it advisable to enter the valley, we ought manfully to face the consequences' (T 85). A division opens between Tommo and Toby motivated by class (the very thing which Tommo had hoped to prevent in his particular choice of companion). Where Toby will meet events squarely as they happen, Tommo uses his narrative to conceal his continual disappointment and to reiterate his pretensions to control. The narrative faithfully (if ironically) records Toby's progressive satire of Tommo's travel-memoir affectations:

'I will tell you what, my pleasant fellow,' rejoined Toby quickly, 'if you are going to pry into everything you meet with here that excites your curiosity, you will marvellously soon get knocked on the head' (T 59)

This tension continues once they have entered the valley and met the Typees. Now that he is surrounded by people who appear friendly, Tommo seems to think he can dispense with his companion. Enjoying Kory-Kory's service and Fayaway's ministrations, Tommo marginalises Toby: 'As for Toby, he was allowed to help himself after his own fashion' (T 109). Whereas Tommo usually spoke previously in the plural, he here adopts the singular pronoun of the travel author. Yet when danger threatens, he suddenly halts his descriptive reverie and recalls his companion (who replies bluntly "'Why, they are cannibals!'" T 119).

By now it is almost as if Toby has become an embarrassment to his 'cultivated' accomplice. Even at the point of his departure from the valley, Tommo noticeably directs attention entirely towards himself:

Yes, thought I, gloomily, he has secured his own escape, and cares not what calamity may befall his unfortunate comrade, Fool that I was, to suppose that any one would willingly encounter the perils of this valley, after having once got beyond its limits! He has gone, and has left me alone to combat all the

dangers by which I am surrounded, (T 133)

Here there is little concern for Toby, only total self-preoccupation (Tommo's usual emotion). Within a few pages, he has forgotten his companion, and he then remains largely absent from the narrative, and his fate a 'mystery', until it ends (T 292).

On one level, then, Toby is 'talked out' by the narrator's voice. But interrogation of Tommo's rhetoric reveals Toby's opposition, and as a result his counterpoint sticks in the memory. His earthy bluntness reinforces our impression of Tommo's effeteness and class-motivation. Despite being as bigoted in his attitude towards the Typees as Tommo, he demonstrates both that Western society is not the monolithic structure suggested by Tommo's conventional narration, and also that it is completely pervaded by imperialist and colonialist attitudes. Consequently, Melville shows that there is no solidarity in Western society - the class system undermines bonds of loyalty and fractures the basic social fabric. This is a revelation which offers considerable hope to those excluded from positions of power in contemporary America - like Toby, they too may be able to offer resistance. Although it is clear that we cannot simply attribute Toby's voice to 'Melville', the young sailor is significant as an alternative focus of values in the text.

But the Typees are far more important as a voice of dissent. The renegades first actually meet a Typee in Chapter 10. I have already commented that Tommo's portrayal of the scene is undercut by Melville, but there is also a second important feature; these rapacious cannibals hide themselves from contact with the Westerners:

Disregarding his injunction, I quickly approached him and caught a glimpse of two figures partly hidden by the dense foliage; they were standing close

together, and were perfectly motionless. They must have previously perceived us, and withdrawn into the depths of the wood to elude our observation, (786)

Then follows a parable of the whole book. Tommo and Toby advance on the islanders, shatter their seclusion, and force an encounter:

My mind was at once made up. Dropping my staff - I unrolled the cotton cloth, and holding it in one hand plucked with the other a twig from the bushes beside me, and telling Toby to follow my example, I broke through the covert and advanced, waving the branch in a token of peace towards the shrinking forms before me, (786)

In a stereotyped image of 'culture' confronting 'nature', the Typees are trapped at the initiative of the previously terrified Westerners. Even though the reality will soon be that Tommo and Toby are imprisoned, it is they who precipitate the situation; the Typees repeatedly retreat:

And thus they stood together, their heads inclined forward, catching the faint noise we made in our progress, and with one foot in advance, as if half inclined to fly from our presence, (786)

This scene alone could be Melville's comment on the values of his narrator. Trying to disguise his fundamental insecurity, Tommo reveals his pretensions to control, presenting the encounter as the epitome of the white-man-meets-native travel narrative scenario. Melville's presentation is, however, far more subtle. More important than the Typees' withdrawal (which could be attributed to instinct), is their persistent refusal of 'exchange' with the Westerners; Tommo apparently thinks the islanders will be persuaded into friendship by bribes - they decline the offer:

As we drew near their alarm evidently increased. Apprehensive that they might fly from us altogether, I stopped short and motioned them to advance and receive the gift I extended towards them, but they would not, (787)

Thus rather than an automatic recoil, the Typees have a coherent policy of silence, maintained even once the captives have been taken to the village:

He never once opened his lips, but maintained his severe expression of countenance, without turning his face aside for a single moment. Never before had I been subjected to so strange and steady a glance; it revealed nothing of the mind of the savage, but it appeared to be reading my own, (789)



At their mercy, it is here Tommo and his companion who are made the object of the Typees' scrutiny, which disconcerts Tommo very much. This encourages him to attempt to regain the initiative:

After undergoing this scrutiny till I grew absolutely nervous, with a view of diverting it if possible, and conciliating the good opinion of the warrior, I took some tobacco from the bosom of my frock and offered it to him. He quietly rejected the proffered gift, and, without speaking, motioned me to return it to its place. (789)

Consistently, then, the Typees refuse to be 'bought'. Their refusal of exchange is a vital element in Melville's development of their function in the novel. *Typee* presents an island people thereby challenging Western pretensions to control (even if it was written in the knowledge that their challenge was doomed). Far from acting in an intuitive 'natural' way, they behave as the advanced, cohesive society that they are. In their dogged silence, they permit us by a process of irony to appreciate Western values even more clearly. Tommo tries to elicit favour by barter; Toby attempts it through paternalist amateur dramatics, both are ultimately humiliated:

Toby went through with a complete series of pantomimic illustrations - opening his mouth from ear to ear, and thrusting his fingers down his throat, gnashing his teeth and rolling his eyes about, (787)

The point about this presentation is that the Typees are never romanticised by Melville. He presents them in an unbiassed, unemotional way, establishing their value by contrasting it with the posturing of the sailors. Thus it is Tommo who sentimentalises - and in this oblique presentation, Melville frees the Typees from his grasp. Contemporary elitist commentary on American-Indians closely resembles in attitudes and language these remarks by Tommo, again proving his representative function. It was typical nineteenth-century 'anthropology' to present non-Westerners as 'savages'; this enabled their dispossession by the colonisers to be simultaneously justified and disguised.<sup>21</sup>

Eventually, of course, Tommo and Toby are tolerated in the valley. But it is important that a parallel dialectic is established as in Tommo's relationship with Toby. In both cases, Tommo's claims to authority are challenged, and he repeatedly restates them with more emphasis. Yet as he tries to resume the characteristic elitist pose to which he feels entitled, we are instructed as to the nature of that stance, informed about its fragility, and alerted to the possibility of challenging it.

Seen in this light, *Typee* is not the monologic text that it can at first appear. Although Tommo strives hard to make his voice dominant, its ascendance is not total. It must constantly struggle against other voices such as Toby's, against the silences and refusals of the Typees, and against the ambiguous testimony of the missionary-travel convention, which Tommo ironically invokes as support. Each of these voices and silences carry with it that which cannot be accommodated, and so they refuse the grounds by which Tommo is including them in his narrative. In this way, Melville shows that all literature is inherently political and in itself a ground for struggle, an arena for the conflict of cultural values.<sup>22</sup>

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#### Language as Politics: The Central Issue of *Typee*

Thus Melville constantly asks the audience to consider *Typee's* concern with language. The 'internal' tensions of the novel, and its representative relationship with American society, stress that language is itself a political register and can be a political tool.

I demonstrated above that Melville as author subverts Tommo's voice,

using Tommo's own references as centres of satirical opposition, and developing the characters in Tommo's narrative so as to challenge the narrator's hegemony. Although we have already noticed how the Typees 'refuse exchange', preferring instead silence, their whole apprehension of the function of language is entirely different from the Western one.

Tommo and Toby, the text stresses, are adept in the manipulation of words (Tommo is, after all, the narrator). On first meeting the Typees, they feverishly question them to find out which tribe they belong to:

'We shall soon know', I exclaimed; and at the same moment I stepped forward towards our guides, and pronouncing the two names interrogatively and pointing to the lowest part of the valley, endeavored to come to the point at once, (785)

Yet while remaining silent, we are also told that the Typees respond even more disconcertingly:

They repeated the words after me again and again, but without giving any particular emphasis to either, so that I was completely at a loss to understand them, (787-8)

Tommo is incredulous that his words could mean nothing at all, and repeats his attempts, achieving, as he thinks, success:

More and more curious to ascertain our fate, I now threw together in the form of a question the words 'Happar' and 'Mortarkee', the latter being equivalent to the word 'good'. The two natives interchanged glances of peculiar meaning with one another at this, and manifested no little surprise; but on the repetition of the question, after some consultation together, to the great joy of Toby, they answered in the affirmative, (788)

It is only when they are in the presence of chief Mehevi that the horrible truth is declared; the natives are Typees, not Happers. Why, then, were the Westerners not killed on the spot for their foolishness? The answer to this question contains the solution to Typee's discussion of language.



During their initial meeting, Tommo and Toby attempt to convince the islanders that they are friendly - they use words to persuade them that they have nothing to fear from their visit. The Typees, however, are reluctant to believe them, and this is because:

The intervening mountains, generally two or three thousand feet above the level of the sea, geographically define the territories of each of the hostile tribes, who never cross them, save on some expedition of war or plunder, (735)

This point, recorded by Tommo, is obviously forgotten by him once he has entered the valley; in the Typees' terms, his actions alone make him an aggressor - what he later says cannot undo this. With the heritage of Porter's incursion (see note eight), and with the knowledge of French annexation, the Typees naturally assume that the escapees are also raiders. Unlike the Westerners, they refuse to divorce language from what it signifies - it cannot be used to 'persuade', only to state. Consequently, two views of language are apparently propounded in *Typee*: the key issue for the sailors is whether they are in the correct valley, and they will alter what they say according to what they find; the key issue for the Typees is that the sailors have behaved as aggressors, and the Typees do not respond to their verbal play because in this context it is a meaningless confusion. For the Westerners, language is in this situation a tool with which to achieve desired ends. For the Typees, in contrast, language is recognised to be indivisible from action and intent. The remainder of the novel interrogates the significance of this distinction. To root this analysis again in the contemporary United States debate, Emerson in his essay *Nature* (1836) was characteristic in pejoratively proposing that: 'children and savages use only nouns or names of things, which they convert into verbs, and apply to analogous mental acts'<sup>23</sup>

The Westerners, and then Tommo alone, consistently test, cajole, and belabour the Typees with words. Just as consistently, the Typees resist their verbal blandishments. Chief Mehevi is especially taciturn:

I accosted Mehevi in a good-humoured tone, with a view of dissipating any ill impression he might have received. But the ireful, angry chief was not so easily mollified. He rejected my advances with that peculiarly stern expression I have before described, and took care by the whole of his behaviour towards me to show the displeasure and resentment which he felt. (7170)

Here the division is very clear between Tommo's spoken posturing (his attitude to Mehevi has not changed), and the chief's concrete association of words with attitudes. Another example underlines the point:

Almost frenzied at being held in this state of suspense, I passionately besought Mehevi to permit me to proceed ... Again and again I renewed my petition to Mehevi. He regarded me with a fixed and serious eye, but at length yielding to my importunity, reluctantly granted my request. (7284)

This is from the escape narrative at the end of the book, and demonstrates the kind of verbal pressure to which Tommo exposes the islanders.

On one issue, the Western use of language is particularly obvious. When Tommo's request to take a woman into his canoe is received with horror, he resolves to use all his powers of persuasion to attain his wish:

I not only wanted the canoe to stay where it was, but I wanted the beautiful Fayaway to get into it and paddle with me about the lake. This proposition completely horrified Kory-Kory's notions of propriety. He inveighed against it as something too monstrous to be thought of. It not only shocked their established notions of propriety, but was at variance with all their religious ordinances.

However, although the 'taboo' was a ticklish thing to meddle with, I determined to test its capabilities of resisting an attack. (7158-9)

Tommo persists in his arguments despite Mehevi's lengthy explanation of the history and significance of the taboo, and justifies his desire on Western grounds:

Such an event I believe never before had occurred in the valley; but it was high time the islanders should be taught a little gallantry, and I trust that the example I set them may produce beneficial effects. Ridiculous, indeed,

that the lovely creatures should be obliged to paddle about in the water, like so many ducks, while a parcel of great strapping fellows skimmed over its surface in their canoes, (T 159)

Yet, as the first quotation shows, Tommo is well-aware of the significance of his request. When he says that Mehevi's speech: 'employ[ed] a variety of most extraordinary words, which, from their amazing length and sonorousness, I have every reason to believe were of a theological nature' (T 159), he indicates his comprehension. However he might satirise the chief, he knows that this is an expression of Mehevi's attitude. Tommo's amusement, then, is due to the fact that unlike Mehevi he can obscure his selfish motivation under 'acceptable' expressions. In this light, Mehevi's coherence of language and belief is a strikingly attractive alternative to Tommo's dislocation. The chief could not dissemble to gain his wishes, because the concept just does not exist in his society.

Thus Tommo explicitly denies his growing comprehension of Typee society, continually using his own language to portray the Typees as something that they are not. At one level, this is because he feels increasingly threatened by what he sees. To call the young men:

Dissipated, good-for-nothing, roystering young blades of savages, who were either employed in prosecuting love affairs with the maidens of the tribe, or grew boozy on 'arva' and tobacco in the company of congenial spirits, the scapegraces of the valley, (T 105)

is to invoke an elitist Western model as a defensive ploy. This impression may be deepened by Tommo's presentation of the vital issue of tattooing. Having been in the valley some months, and having observed the operation, Tommo is amazed when he is proposed as a patient.

Tommo says that he recoils from being tattooed because it would make him 'hideous for life' (T 254). Yet this is to hide his comprehension of the underlying situation: 'the whole system of tattooing was, I found,



connected with their religion; and it was evident, therefore, that they were resolved to make a convert of me' (T 256). His persistent pose of ignorance is a sham: 'like the still more important system of the "Taboo", it always appeared inexplicable to me' (T 257). It only demonstrates his continual willingness to play the 'innocuous' travel memoirist:

The capricious operations of the taboo is not its least remarkable feature; to enumerate them all would be impossible. Black hogs - infants to a certain age - women in an interesting situation - young men while the operation of tattooing their faces is going on - and certain parts of the valley during the continuance of a shower - are alike fenced about by the operation of the taboo, (T 259)

In reacting against the threat of being tattooed, Tommo resorts to polemic. This disguises his clear recognition of the Typees' wish to incorporate him into their society (and that the tattoo is their way of doing this). Although he acted as an aggressor in crossing the mountains, his subsequent behaviour has indicated friendship, and so they find it only logical that he should physically demonstrate his new allegiance, which the tattoo would do. In Tommo's reluctance to submit to such a demonstration we see that he has appreciated the upright Typees' challenge to his own duplicitous signifying system. In contrast to his Western perception, by inscribing on their bodies the attitudes to which they also give voice, the Typees underline their immutable correlation of words and actions.<sup>24</sup>

When first threatened by tattooing, Tommo's emotional outburst seems to be in the defensive mould of so many previous such comments: 'there was no one with whom I could freely converse; no one to whom I could communicate my thoughts; no one who could sympathise with my sufferings' (T 268). When he finds traces of cannibalism, however, he says that he views them as conclusive evidence of Typee depravity, and with the spectre of being tattooed, he uses this as an excuse for initiating the climax of

the novel: 'the last horrid revelation had now been made, and the full sense of my condition rushed upon my mind with a force I had never before experienced' (T 276). Regardless of the fact that nothing at all has changed in the Typees' behaviour, Tommo now resolves to escape. So the crisis seems at first not to threaten the integrity of the Typees, but to indicate that their distinctive way of life has so threatened Tommo that he feels he must leave. This is to prejudge hastily.

What is actually demonstrated in the final chapters is that Tommo feels he has reached the stage when he can no longer successfully assault the islanders with words alone; he must combine these with actions. When news comes of a ship in the bay at the end of the valley, his demeanour suddenly changes. Despite his swollen leg, he resolves to force a path to the sea. Because of the fact that he is disabled, he must still rely heavily on rhetoric; but this is a massive transformation:

As soon as we had approached, I endeavoured to make them understand that I was going down to the sea to meet Toby ... Almost frenzied at being held in this state of suspense, I passionately besought Mehevi to permit me to proceed ... He regarded me with a fixed and serious eye, but at length yielding to my importunity, reluctantly granted my request. (T 283-4)

At this point, Tommo suddenly reveals the latent strength of his position. He reinforces his words with the power of the Western civilisation that he represents. Ever since he entered the valley, the Typees have been preoccupied by the presence of the French in Nukuhiva:

Then they plied us with a thousand questions, of which we could understand nothing more than that they had reference to the recent movements of the French, against whom they seemed to cherish the most fierce hatred. (T 94)

From the frequent recurrence of the words 'Nukuheva' and 'Franee' (French), and some others with the meaning of which I was acquainted, he appeared to be rehearsing to his auditors events which had recently occurred in the neighbouring bays. (T 164)

Intrinsically allied to the French by race (and representative function),

Tommo also reminds the Typees of the force of Western arms wielded by that previous American visitor, Porter, and they reluctantly let him go. At this point, then, Melville's crucial insight is revealed: whatever he might like to have suggested by his seemingly inert descriptions and docile behaviour, Tommo's rhetoric, too, is not divorced from his attitudes. The difference between him and the Typees is that the society he represents is characterised by internal dissent, deception, and elitist rapacity, not harmony and order. In his previous use of language to achieve his own ends, he has also been true to himself.

To split Western and Typeean understanding of language along lines of 'tool' and 'unified expression' is thus something of a simplification. A more accurate analysis is to say that each society conceptualises its language in a way that coheres with its own general ideology. In the Typeean language, there are no 'terms to express the delightful ideas conveyed by our own endless list of civilised crimes' (T 151) because that society is characterised by 'the unanimity of feeling displayed on every occasion' (T 238). It has no such thing as dissent. In the West, with its elitist domination, there is only rhetoric, persuasion, and deception:

Guided by this consideration, I turned to Mow-Mow, the only chief present whom I had been much in the habit of seeing, and carefully concealing my real design, tried to make him comprehend that I still believed Toby to have arrived on the shore, and besought him to allow me to go forward to welcome him. To all his repeated assertions, that my companion had not been seen, I pretended to turn a deaf ear; while I urged my solicitations with an eloquence of gesture which the one-eyed chief appeared unable to resist, (7 285-6)

Tommo's language, then, like his narrative, is used to conceal divisions and doubts which have their origins in the perpetual struggle for power necessitated by the effort to maintain intact the 'idea of America', and to



impose it on the dispossessed. When pressurised, it clearly demonstrates its motivation.<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, the tragedy of the Typees as Melville portrays it is that because their world view is so coherent, they inevitably bring their fate upon themselves. In the novel, by seeking to incorporate into their society someone whose expression of hostility in crossing the mountains seems to have been reformed in his subsequent words and actions, they force him to declare his hand and act as the true aggressor he is. Tommo's function in the text, as representative of the contemporary U.S. elite, is to force his world view on to the Typees in an historical parable of what was happening throughout the Pacific. Crucially, the victory of his position is recorded by noting that he has succeeded in shattering the Typees' previous harmony and imposing his own view of language as contest and persuasive device on to them. During his escape, the previously unanimous Typees argue among themselves, and eventually come to blows:

It was at this agonizing moment, when I thought all hope was ended, that a new contest arose between the two parties who had accompanied me to the shore; blows were struck, wounds were given, and blood flowed, (7289)

Tommo's ultimate resort to violence symbolises his whole stance:

It was no time for pity or compunction, and with a true aim, and exerting all my strength, I dashed the boat-hook at him. It struck him just below the throat, and forced him downwards, (7291)

The point, however, is that because Melville develops his view of the Typees on the basis of their understanding of language, he does not romanticise them as Tommo does. In his hands, they are seen to be an advanced society with a far more honest ideology than the West. They do not initially hide the real nature of their world-view, only to reveal it at the decisive moment, as does Tommo. Far from being 'backward savages' who 'deserve to be crushed', Melville presents them as victims of their own

integrity, who should gain the reader's support by the simple fact that unlike the Westerners, they do act with integrity. In the Typees' incorrupt demise we have a measure of Melville's indictment of his own society. Although he himself never wrote directly about the fate of American-Indians, his analysis of U.S. imperialism in the Pacific is equally applicable to their internal victimisation. American elitist ambition turned both groups into dispossessed voices.<sup>26</sup>

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#### Reception and Intention

By analysing the text of *Typee*, and especially its concern with language-issues, this chapter has sought to establish Melville's continued dissent from his own class and society. At a much more developed level, the method and motivation of *Typee* are the same as those that were first shadowed in the *Fragments from a Writing Desk*. In both, Melville shows how the typical language of the American elite encodes its political and social inspiration, and in both he satirises the representative voice as a mark of his own disagreement with it. *Typee*, however, takes the debate further; it does not just anatomise the attitudes which were sponsoring Western colonialism, but challenges them. In one sense, it is an historical novel - an expose of the armed annexation of Pacific islands by Western nations. More pointedly, it confronts the U.S.'s imperialist intentions in the Pacific.

The link which *Typee* reveals is that between the 'armchair' American imperialists who supported covertly colonial movements such as the

American Missionary Society, and the merchants, sailors, soldiers and expeditionaries who imposed American hegemony 'in the field'. In Norman Graebner's terms, 'empire on the Pacific' found its roots in Yankee mercantile zeal and Southern tactical expansion. In 1844, 'Hawaii was a piece of New England in mid-Pacific', 'with whalemens and merchant sailors rolling through its streets, shops fitted with Lowell shirtings, New England rum and Yankee notions, [and] orthodox missionaries living in frame houses brought round the Horn ...'.<sup>27</sup> In the description of a genteel reception, *Typee* makes the link explicit:

How little do some of these poor islanders comprehend when they look around them, that no inconsiderable part of their disasters originate in certain tea-party excitements, under the influence of which benevolent-looking gentlemen in white cravats solicit alms, and old ladies in spectacles, and young ladies in sober russet gowns, contribute sixpences towards the creation of a fund, (7230)

The point of the novel, however, is that Melville operated subversively. Not he, but Tommo, the representative voice, makes this proclamation, and thus the author safeguards himself against immediate censure. Melville's problem was how to raise consciousness without being immediately silenced for demonstrating the consequences of connections that many would have preferred should remain obscure. How to challenge the readership which at the same time was the protagonist in the colonial tea party? The only possible method was by subversion, and even then, it could be resisted:

We shall attempt to canvass some of its statements, wherein the cause of MISSIONS is assailed, with a pertinacity of misrepresentation and degree of *hatred*, which can only entitle the perpetrator to the just claim of traducer, (*Christian Parlour Magazine* July 1846)

Nevertheless, with some readers, Melville brilliantly succeeded:

Many of the observations and narratives we suppose to be strictly correct, Is the account of the result of the missionary enterprises in the Sandwich Islands of this number? We suppose so from what we have heard in other ways, With a view to ascertaining the truth, it would be well if the sewing



societies, now engaged in providing funds for such enterprises would read the particulars, they will find in this book beginning p.249, vol. 2d, and make inquiries in consequence, before going on with their efforts. Generally, the sewing societies of the country villages will find this the very book they wish to have read while assembled at their work. (M.Fuller New York *Tribune* 4 April 1846)

Beneath the cosily complicit front presented by Tommo's romanticising, it is thus Melville who seeks to criticise American elitist activists. His decision to do so 'from within' was taken in order to avoid his society's strategy to 'contain' criticism in the way that Tommo characteristically does it; by sentimentalising island life. The creation of Tommo as typical representative narrator was Melville's first move in this process. Tommo represents everything which Melville feels should be repudiated: class bias, paternalism, and the duplicitous manipulation of language to achieve desired ends. By incorporating this presence in to his text, Melville thus typified those contemporary values that he anathematised, and also suggested the existence of others with which he agreed. As a focus for elitist aspirations, Tommo is progressively undercut by both the author and the supposed objects of his own narration. Yet eventually he is pushed far enough to have to reveal the strength of his position, and to pronounce the Typees' doom. The novel is grim. Because as an author he specifically refused to sentimentalise the Typees (leaving this project only to the hypocritical Tommo), Melville presents the reality of their situation; they literally face extinction.

And yet, because *Typee* relies for its comprehension on an active reader willing to delve beneath surface appearances, it also offers hope. By illustrating the extent to which language is a political reality, Melville offers to that sensitive reader the knowledge of participation in

a struggle. In a world in which the dominant classes always seek to portray others as 'alien' and 'heterodox', *Typee* illustrates that it is possible to penetrate the elite's rhetoric, and to subvert it. For although the Typees are the literal victims in the text, their courage has forced the aggressor's hand to be declared, and his attitudes and processes to be revealed. This is both to present the marginalised with a target, and because it is a goal achieved 'ironically', to defend against the possibility of an elitist counter-attack.

In other words, *Typee* demonstrates that by 'reading against the grain' - by isolating others' core attitudes and by resisting reincorporation at their hands - progress to social equity may be made. Because social existence is also constituted by language, and because language is not the exclusive property of one class or group, although one might have little physical power, one does have massive subversive power. The sad fact of capitalist society as it was developing in the nineteenth-century was that it refused to state its governing premises openly. *Typee* acknowledged this fact, and accepted it as a challenge.

An indication of Melville's confidence is that when on the novel's publication the elite's forces of suppression swung into action, he complied with Murray's request to remove some of the anti-missionary polemic for the second edition of the book. His letters do not suggest that this dismayed him:

I am persuaded that the interest of the book almost wholly consists in the *intrinsick merit of the narrative alone* - & that other portions, however interesting they may be in themselves, only serve to impede the story. (To J. Murray 15 July 1846 *Letters* p.39)

This comment reveals that as far as Melville was concerned, it is the novel as a whole which is critical of the missionaries, not the most

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obvious passages. Tommo as representative narrator is the focus of his anger; the narrator's diatribes are mere decoys. Consequently, Melville's later remark is extremely ironic: 'all passages which are calculated to offend the tastes, or offer violence to the feelings of any large class of readers are certainly objectionable' (*Letters* p.39). This actually denotes Melville's sense of victory; he will ostensibly pander to those readers who are his target, because in doing so he retains his basic appraisal.

Certainly, *Typee* treads a dangerous tight-rope. In recognising that nineteenth-century American society can only be adequately criticised 'from within', the book seeks to guard against its immediate rejection, and to exemplify the kinds of attitudes which governed contemporary America. A history of subsequent criticism which fails to grasp that its primary interest is in using a satirical method to expose the processes at work in nineteenth-century society perhaps suggests that it was less successful in its first aim than Melville's letter to Murray led him to hope it would be. It was, however, eminently successful in its second. To read *Typee* is to be given an excellent insight into the social ideology and outlook of the mid-nineteenth-century American elite.



## OMOO

'Perhaps Melville is at his best, his  
happiest, in *Omoo*. For once he is  
really reckless.'

D.H.Lawrence.

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Introduction

Should *Omoo*, which was published in March and May 1847, be seen as a continuation of *Typee*? The Preface discourages a seamless approach:

The present narrative necessarily begins where 'Typee' concludes, but has no further connection with the later work. All, therefore, necessary for the reader to understand, who has not read 'Typee', is given in a brief introduction, (O 326)

But this 'Introduction', in providing a short synopsis of the previous book, reasserts the link. Commentators have noticed that this causes a problem, but have failed to recognise its significance:

What Melville wrote in *Omoo* in 1846 was a continuation of the narrative he had begun in *Typee*. Yet he looked upon it as a sequel to the earlier book only in a loose sense ... The actual events in *Typee* had been easy to mold into an escape-captivity-escape pattern, but those of *Omoo* lacked such cohesiveness.'

Owing to this fact, they have often simply assimilated *Omoo* to its predecessor (as Roper does note):

Critics since the Melville revival about 1919, preoccupied with the more complex later works, have found little to say about *Omoo*. Their comment, always brief, is usually couched in terms of a comparison with *Typee*, to which *Omoo* is almost always found inferior in originality, unity, and imaginative power.

This has meant that *Omoo*, when noticed at all, has been cast as a further exploration of paradise, a supplementary romp around the Pacific: 'the sunniest of Melville's tales'.<sup>2</sup>

Yet *Omoo* is devalued if it is simply appended to *Typee*. Although sales of *Omoo* in Melville's lifetime were slightly less than for *Typee* (13,335 as opposed to 16,320), the author's return on his second novel was better (\$1719.78 rather than \$1138.61), and more importantly, *Omoo* was massively reviewed: 'probably few books by young American writers were as extensively noticed in the mid-nineteenth-century' (*Omoo*/Roper p.334).<sup>3</sup> Although the text may seem artless, Melville took great care in its

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production, submitting a draft to Evert Duyckinck for comments. This all reveals that it was the focus for intensive thought and labour; *Omoo* deserves serious consideration. If Murray was happy to publish it in his *Home and Colonial Library*, despite its apparent 'anti-missionary' polemic, it seems that Melville had judged his intended audience's attitudes well. Similarly, unless it represents a massive retreat from the anti-Western stance of *Typee*, the traditionally 'genial' *Omoo* must then be a far more complex book than has generally been thought. Is it a 'retreat', or does it too record dissent? These issues are the subject of this chapter.

#### 1) Orientation

I think you will find it a fitting successor to *Typee*; inasmuch as the latter book delineates Polynesian Life in its primitive state - while the new work, represents it, as affected by intercourse with the whites, (*Letters* No,33 p,53, to John Murray)

So Melville significantly said of *Omoo*, stressing the deliberateness of his compositional process. He planned his second novel's relationship with the first. There is a sense of progression from *Typee* to *Omoo*.

In *Omoo*, Melville moves the scene from the Marquesas Islands to Tahiti. In geographical terms the shift is small, because the island groups are fairly close to each other. Yet historically and culturally, in the mid-nineteenth-century, the leap was gargantuan. In *Typee*, Melville depicted a society on the verge of its ultimate crisis. His novel portrays the beginning of the islands' annexation by the French, and in focussing on the clash of typical Western attitudes with those of the still independent Typees, explores the differences between them, and the possibilities for hope that these differences suggest. Consequently, the novel is in its own right politically subversive.



Subversion, however, seems alien to Omoo. Here, that crisis has passed; the Tahitians have effectively been conquered, and they form a sorry contrast with their proud fellows in the Marquesas. Nevertheless, the islanders' 'absence' in *Omoo* is itself significant. For in moving to Tahiti, Melville is showing the next stage in the imperialist process. As the text itself records:

Of Tahiti, earlier and more full accounts were given, than of any other island in Polynesia; and this is the reason why it still retains so strong a hold on the sympathies of all readers of South Sea voyages. (O 394)

Tahiti is thus the prime contemporary example of Western influence in the Pacific, with the most extensive alien presence, and the longest established missions. So in *Omoo* Melville can depict the consolidation after the crisis; the legitimation that follows any act of aggression.

Melville's purposive contemplation of Pacific colonialism can, moreover, be judged by the fact that the Appendix to *Typee* consists of a reference to events in Tahiti, and a description of proceedings in Hawaii, not, as might have been expected, further comment on those in the Marquesas. Presented in his usual intricate way, Melville's narrator in this Appendix seems to support British military involvement against American commercial activities. This is an artful move; although it apparently establishes the narrator's 'even-handedness', it actually reinforces the dominance of specifically Western discourse about the islands. Here, the islanders are presented as being 'as depraved and vicious as ever' (T 297), and Protestant penal laws are extolled (T 295). Again, then, one of Melville's representative narrators speaks and is satirised by the author. And in further anatomising the elitist stance, the Appendix prepares for *Omoo's* shift to Tahiti, the epicentre of Western

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colonial activity, demonstrating both the sense of progression in Melville's early novels, and his more than academic engagement with Pacific events.

#### 11) Tahiti - History

Tahiti was discovered by the West on June 19 1767, by a British Navy captain. It was Louis Bougainville, however, who visited the island in 1768, and first associated it with paradise, saying that he felt 'transported into the Garden of Eden'.<sup>4</sup> Immediately after its discovery, it occasioned the particular interest of three Western nations: Britain, France, and Spain. In 1797, the first missionaries arrived - Protestants, from the London Missionary Society. They were followed in 1800 by the first traders, and it was with the traders, and specifically the whalers, that American influence was felt.

From 1800-1802, the Tahitians were embroiled in civil war, but because of the introduction of Western weapons, this was far bloodier than any previous strife. With the combined effects of battle and disease, 50% of the population was wiped out in six years. Clearly, contact with the West was taking its toll. War broke out again in 1807, and the country was virtually ungovernable, because King Pomare II had become an alcoholic (analogies with the fate of American-Indians can, of course, again be drawn).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in 1815 the king converted to Christianity, and the number of his people following his example led to the belief that Tahiti was soon to be a Christian country. The island was seen as the jewel of Protestant endeavour in the Pacific, and indeed the missionaries treated it as a private domain, themselves crowning Pomare III in an 'elaborate, British-style ceremony' (Langdon, p.124), in 1821 at the age of five.

Yet the Protestant hegemony was soon to be challenged. Roman Catholic missionaries landed from France in 1835, the harbingers of the eventual colonial power. Despite English and American protests, their work continued. In 1837, the British Consul, Pritchard (himself a missionary), expelled the French priests. Thus in 1838 Admiral Du Petit Thouars arrived, threatening war unless his compatriots were restored, and reparation paid. By this time, Tahiti's eventual fate was assured. Queen Pomare, perhaps sensing the drift of events, asked for British protection, and fled when the French arrived (the visit of the *Reine Blanche*, described in *Omoa*). Protection was refused, the British government presumably having decided that, although their missionaries had been successful, to allow the French a sphere of influence in Tahiti would deflect their attention from British activities elsewhere in the Pacific. Consequently, when in 1843 Du Petit Thouars annexed the island and deposed the queen, the British again refused to help her, in fact virtually imprisoning her on a naval ship, and then taking her to Raiatea, where they simply left her. When in 1847 she reluctantly submitted to the French protectorate, Pomare was returned to Tahiti, but as a puppet monarch. Tahiti had been conquered.

This summary highlights the nature of Western interest in Tahiti. The Europeans were concerned with sovereignty, as they struggled to build their empires; the Americans more with economic imperialism. All, however, had no qualms about subjugating another advanced culture. Although conquest was not immediate, it was inevitable, and by the time *Omoa* is set, was in its final throes. The Western presence was well-established, the islanders had been largely down-trodden; all that remained was to secure the final treaty and 'legitimise' what had already happened.



iii) *Omoo* - Preliminary remarks on structure

So in shifting to Tahiti, Melville takes a step Westwards, closer to his own society, more directly into its sphere of influence. This means that the novel is concerned with the attitudes and techniques of the mid-nineteenth-century cultural and territorial imperialists, of whom the elite-dominated U.S.A. was one. It also means that the novel is part of a concentrated analysis of the politics of imperialism, from sponsoring attitudes, through first steps, to self-declaration in action, consolidation, and 'legitimation'.

Given its apparent relationship with its predecessor, Melville not surprisingly uses the structural framework in *Omoo* that he established in *Typee*. In *Typee*, the device of the representative narrator allowed him to typify the values and methods employed in imperialism, and to show how all contributions, even seemingly inert memoirs, participated in this political process because they bore the indelible marks of their political inspiration. *Omoo's* narrator is identically representative.

For instance, immediately he escapes he romanticises his experiences:

So unforeseen and sudden had been my escape, so excited had I been through it all, and so great the contrast between the luxurious repose of the valley, and the wild noise and motion of the ship at sea, that at times my recent adventures had all the strangeness of a dream; and I could scarcely believe that the same sun now setting over a waste of waters, had that very morning risen above the mountains and peered in upon me as I lay on my mat in *Typee*. (0 331)

He also employs the characteristic technique of classifying the islanders, objectifying them for his readers, denying them their own reality:

The Tahitians have much natural talent for singing; and, on all occasions, are exceedingly fond of it ... With respect to singing, as in most other matters, the Tahitians widely differ from the people of the Sandwich Islands, where the parochial flocks may be said rather to *bleat* than *sing*. (0 498)

Likewise, he revels in his surroundings as (people-less) picturesque:

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Across the water, the land rolled away in bright hillsides, so warm and undulating, that they seemed almost to palpitate in the sun. On we swept, past bluff and grove, wooded glen and valley, and dark ravines lighted up far inland with wild falls of water. A fresh land-breeze filled our sails, the embayed waters were gentle as a lake, and every blue wave broke with a tinkle against our coppered prow. (O 352)

Hence the narrator of *Omo* has the same function as Tommo; to act as the typical elitist presence in the text. For all the commentators who insist on the book's good humour, only one seems alive to this point:

In *Omo* as in *Typee*, the protagonist searches for and fails to find ample food, freedom, and sex, while simultaneously seeking order, morality, and an authority figure who can provide these things. That is, Tommo-Omo is a typical young American protagonist. Critics have misconstrued *Omo* by focussing on the narrator's seemingly libertine and antiauthoritarian [sic] vigor at the expense of his strong but rudimentary conservatism.<sup>6</sup>

Yet from this determinate point, Melville develops his material in a different way in the new situation of Tahiti, and with different ends. Here the questions he must ask are: How does Western society come to terms with its conquests? What is the role of literature in this process? Is the representative narrator ever challenged to 'declare his hand' as he was in *Typee*? Moreover, how is it possible for Melville to register political dissent in a cultural context where his narrator will be less vulnerable to satirical subversion?

These fundamental questions are all broachable through knowledge of the textual strategies uncovered in *Typee*. The persistent device of the representative narrator enables Melville to apply his analysis to this new situation.

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Concealment and Consumption

The narrator's story in *Omoo* tells first of his reincorporation into the life of the *Julia*, then of his friendship with the surgeon, Dr. Long Ghost. The *Julia* is ineffectually run, so that after a number of maritime escapades, the crew mutinies off Tahiti. The consul tries to quell the insurrection by imprisoning the mutineers ashore. This measure fails, and they are soon able to roam throughout the island. In company with Long Ghost, however, the narrator eventually distances himself from his fellows, and enlists as a labourer on the neighbouring island, Imeeo. Disliking this work, they extract themselves from their contract and explore the island, arriving eventually at Partoowye, where Queen Pomare is in exile; they visit the court. The narrator now decides to join another whale-ship, and parts from his friend, ending the story.

This relation, like Tommo's in *Typee*, obscures some essential aspects of the representative narrator's conduct: he is at the centre of the unrest on the *Julia*, and instigates its climax; the proceedings on Tahiti and the travels on Imeeo are microcosmic examples of general Western attitudes to the Pacific and its peoples; the narrative he produces is designed to conceal both these things, and by captivating its readers to make them complicit in the misrepresentation.

Before tracing events chronologically, I shall first analyse the two episodes in which Melville most clearly reveals the narrator's activities (and hence his own position), and then comment on the novel as a whole.



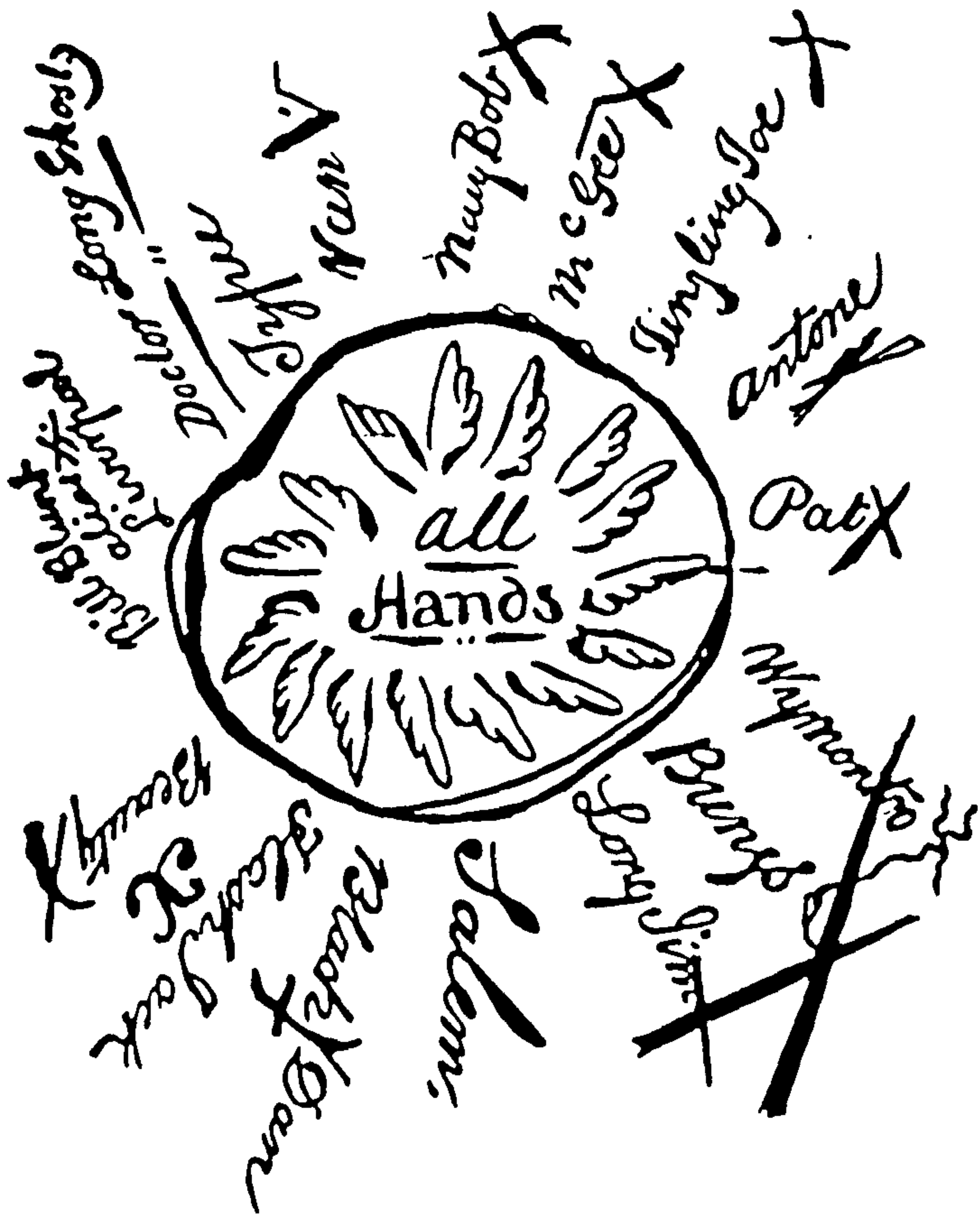
## 1) Concealment: The Mutiny

The mutiny is the crisis of *Omoo* Part One. Before it, the crew has been idly employed on a ship that due to its weak captain and drunken mate has caught no whales. They eventually despair of this situation, and through the mutiny secure a 'better' life ashore. It is important to recognise that it is the elitist narrator and his companion who instigate the mutiny; they are not passive pawns in a general tide, as the narrative hopes to suggest.

Long Ghost initiates the crisis by demanding that the ship be sailed to Tahiti. This point can be overlooked when the narrator speaks of the effort they had later to avoid anarchy: 'Doctor Long Ghost at once broke in ... the mate was in duty bound to navigate the ship to the nearest civilized port' (O 379). He now also resumes his discontinued medical treatment of the captain: 'The doctor, who previously had refused to enter the cabin upon any consideration, now relented, and paid his old enemy a professional visit' (O 378). This is not an act of charity, but a strategy to preserve the precarious balance aboard the *Julia* until they are nearer land. Each action is further evidence of his desire to seize control for himself and his class, and also demonstrates his political awareness that he must not appear to have been too closely involved in any resultant confrontation.

Once Long Ghost has taken these steps, the narrator assumes the more prominent position. He sets himself to record the deliberations of the crew as if he is a dispassionate observer:

Since steering for the land, our prospects had been much talked over. By many it was supposed, that should the captain leave the ship, the crew were no longer bound by her articles. This was the opinion of our forecastle Cokes; though, probably, it would not have been sanctioned by the Marine Courts of Law, (O 396)



The Round-Robin, Omoo <sup>4</sup>

This prepares the way for them both to act as conciliatory figures, disguising their involvement in the anarchistic acceleration to mutiny:

It was soon made plain that we were right in our suspicions; and the men became furious. The cooper and carpenter volunteered to head a mutiny forthwith; and, while Jermin was below, four or five rushed aft to fasten down the cabin scuttle; others, throwing down the main-braces, called out to the rest to lend a hand, and fill away for the land. All this was done in an instant; and things were looking critical, when Doctor Long Ghost and myself prevailed upon them to wait a while, and do nothing hastily; there was plenty of time, and the ship was completely in our power. (O 397)

The 'considerate' pair, however, can scarcely contain the energy released among the crew: 'Several now ran on deck, and, for the moment, I thought it was all over with us; but we finally succeeded in restoring some degree of quiet' (O 408).

At this point the narrator seizes the advantage, and we obtain our demonstration of his processes. He suggests the composition of a Round Robin letter, and significantly, he says he proposes this as a 'way of diverting their thoughts' (O 402). This is to disguise his own culpability in the course of events as the skilled writer present.

The letter is a statement of grievances, but it is artfully produced. By advising that the crew sign in a circle, the narrator can suggest that none of the sailors has responsibility for either the collapse of authority or the mutiny, so obscuring his own involvement in both, and effectively spreading the blame. This suggestion of shared culpability is disingenuous, for as will be seen, the disorder has primarily resulted from the catalytic effect of the narrator and doctor, who have exacerbated the crew's grievances, dissolved authority, and suggested that even the mutiny is in many respects yet another prank. In other words, as a tangible example of a strategy to diffuse responsibility, the letter demonstrates the way the narrator consistently shapes events to his advantage. The



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stock salt-sea names, marshalled into an artful whole, echo the way that he has previously used the characters that they signify to create a narrative in which his own motivational function is obscured.

The mutiny, then, illustrates the concealment to which all Melville's narrators aspire. Although they mould their narratives to accord with the prerogatives of the class they represent, it is essential that they hide their determinate role. The narratives that they produce, however politically partisan they may be, must appear 'natural' and 'given', just like the 'idea of America'. - In order to attain general consent, all of these things must have been 'generally' instituted.

More hopefully, however, the mutiny also illustrates how Melville establishes the conditions in which the narrators sometimes unwittingly reveal that motivation. The fact that the narrator writes the letter on pages drawn from 'A History of the most Atrocious and Bloody Piracies' tends to undercut his presentation of events as literally true. Indeed, it accords perfectly with his policy of subsuming incidents on the Julia to the conventions of nautical novels; which makes this actual crisis in government appear more as a fictional hearty jape. I shall consider the sea-story genre below, but it is also significant that the narrator, in marshalling the names around a blank circle, images his standard compositional technique of manipulating different sources and genres (the sea novel, the travel), and assembling them into an apparently anodyne whole. This is the strategy deployed by all the early narrators.

So through pressing the narratorial device of the Round Robin, the reader is alerted to both the narrator's elaborate structuration of 'truth' and the authorial activity beneath it. The disharmony between the two

indicates Melville's refusal to accept the narrator's suggestion that the mutiny is a general movement rather than a partisan bid for power by Long Ghost and his friend. Legitimate rule aboard the *Julia* has been collapsed, but for the sensitive reader the parties which have organised the collapse can be identified. The point is reinforced by the fact that the consul is also perceptive enough to foil the narrator's fiction:

Marking something in my manner, nevertheless, he asked my name and country; and then observed with a sneer, 'Ah, you are the lad, I see, that wrote the Round Robin; I'll take good care of *you*, my fine fellow - step back, sir,' (0 432)

Melville uses the twin device of the Round-Robin and its subsequent imitation to stress the extent to which the written word was used to control and portray reality. A captain nicknamed 'Paper' Jack is deposed by a paper epistle which itself images the way power is deployed. This emphasis on fictionality indicates Melville's own subversive dissent.

## ii) Consumption

While the mutiny and the Round Robin demonstrate the narrator's reclusive compositional method (and its exposure by Melville), the most significant occurrence in Part Two of the book is the tourist-like jaunt that Long Ghost and his friend indulge in on Imeeo. Having extricated themselves from hard work on the plantation, they set off on what is effectively a bout of unbridled island consumption.

Writing rather like an early travel-brochure, the narrator says:

The doctor was all eagerness to visit Tamai, a solitary inland village, standing upon the banks of a considerable lake of the same name, and embosomed among the groves. From Afrehitoo, you went to this place by a lonely pathway, leading through the wildest scenery in the world, (0 562)

This trip to Tamai is the prototypical tourist excursion, with the Westerners setting out to 'enjoy' the landscape:

Midway up, we rested where the earth had gathered about the roots of the three palms, and thus formed a pleasant lounge, from which we looked down upon the hollow, now one dark-green tuft of woodland at our feet. Here we brought forth a small calabash of 'poe'e', a parting present from Tono'i, (O 565)

Their objective is to see unpolluted island culture:

The village was so remote from the coast, and had been so much less affected by recent changes than other places that, in most things, Tahitian life was here seen, as formerly existing in the days of young Otoo, the boy-king, in Cook's time, (O 562)

When on arrival, therefore, they find that the missionary laws forbid such entertainment, they work to circumvent them: 'we overcame all this, convinced him that the thing could be done, and a "hevar", a genuine pagan fandango, was arranged for that very night' (O 567). The resulting dance is described with all the narrator's considerable flair:

Presently, raising a strange chant, they softly sway themselves, gradually quickening the movement, until, at length, for a few passionate moments, with throbbing bosoms and glowing cheeks, they abandon themselves to all the spirit of the dance, apparently lost to every thing around. But soon subsiding again into the same measure, as before, they become motionless; and then, reeling forward on all sides, their eyes swimming in their heads, join in one wild chorus, and sink into each other's arms, (O 569)

It is the circumvention, however, that should alert the reader to the dance's significance. Whereas the narrator has previously been able to use his narrative to place and describe the islanders as he wishes, at Tamai this purely verbal tactic is no longer sufficient. In order to produce the written record, Long Ghost and his companion must compel the islanders to 'perform picturesquely'. As can be seen, they succeed in fabricating an alluring show, presumably with the narrator intent on providing his audience with a fully entertaining Pacific scene. But should the audience have been 'entertained'? This is the question that Melville silently poses



beneath the narrator's projection. Is an enforced celebration fit subject for an enjoyable evening's reading?

The answer must be 'No', so the point Melville hopes to make is that if the audience is entertained, it is as a result an accomplice to the narrator's falsification. As there is no review evidence of outcry at the Tamai dance, we must presume that the audience did acquiesce in what it read, happily agreeing to the twisted arms and flouted laws so long as it was served its feast of synthetic, romanticised, prohibited past. Far from being the high-point of Part Two, as Long Ghost and the narrator work to make us feel, the dance is the most dispiriting part of the book. Dressed in outlandish clothes (O 564), as if to support their belief that the world is a mere stage for their farce, the sailors set off to encounter 'culture'. Unable to find it easily, they conjure it up by force, requiring the islanders to join their masquerade.

This is one of Melville's most trenchant condemnations of Western involvement in the Pacific. The narrator is here manipulating expectation and convention to make of literature a tool by which to constitute an unreal 'reality'. In the digestion of such material, the complicit audience is reinforcing imperialism. This chapter lays bare the connection between the reading-circles of Boston and the whalers and merchants of Honolulu or Partoowye; it explains the process by which an independent nation such as Hawaii could gradually become incorporated as a state into the U.S.A.

The following succession of incidents as the companions make their way to Partoowye lies under the shadow of this enforced dance. There is a strong contrast between the older travellers who accompany them, and who, like the Typees, attempt to refuse exchange with the Westerners, and the young girls:

Very sad at parting with them, we endeavoured, nevertheless, to console ourselves in the society of our fellow-passengers. Among these were two old ladies; but as they said nothing to us, we will say nothing about them; nor any thing about the old men who managed the canoe. But of the three mischievous, dark-eyed young witches, who lounged in the stern of that comfortable old island gondola, I have a great deal to say. (O 596)

Yet all that the narrator does say turns the women into romanticised stereotypes like Fayaway; his jocularity betrays him. Throughout, the travellers' experiences are presented as dishes of 'Polynesian Life':

Our time passed delightfully. The doctor went his way, and I mine. With a pleasant companion, he was forever strolling inland, ostensibly to collect botanical specimens; while I, for the most part, kept near the sea; sometimes taking the girls an aquatic excursion with a canoe. (O 594)

Both of these bear slight relation to what any contemporary travellers must actually have encountered, though when presented to the readers as 'literature', the tradition suggests that they became the dominant images in their minds. So Melville underpins his censure of the complicit audience by confronting the narrator with other presences for his partisan representation. The dominant image in this part of *Omo* should have been the old man who tries to barter a pair of trousers for tobacco. He lives in terrible conditions, and symbolizes the effect of Westernization on the Tahitians:

It was a mere kennel. Foul old mats, and broken coca-nut shells, and calabashes were strown about the floor of earth; and overhead, I caught glimpses of the stars through the chinks in the roof. Without replying, I hurried away. (O 572)

In offering to barter his trousers, he attempts to return to the travellers that garment which most concisely figures Western involvement in the Pacific; the garment which had to be worn to protect the missionaries' sense of dignity. Ironically, he proffers them only to gain a drug, which will both increase his dependence on the West, and dull his apprehension of it. The parallel with American-Indians is again clear.

The narrator, however, sets the man up as a focus for charity. Supposedly taking pity on the 'goblin' one night, he attends him to his hovel, acting as if he were a great philanthropist in accompanying him: 'The doctor, venturing a curse, hurried forward; but, from some impulse or other, I stood my ground, resolved to find out what this unaccountable object wanted of us' (O 571). Although he flees on being offered the trousers, the implication is that he has fulfilled his duty in going at all. Like the drunkard Varvy, who is equally patronized (O 604), the man should have shaken both the narrator and his audience. His is one of the rare voices of the dispossessed that surface in *Omoo* (allowed probably only because the narrator feels he can sentimentalize him).

The dance and the people who are encountered after it become tests for both narrator and audience. At one level, they demonstrate how Westerners 'consume' alien culture, and how the degradation that this involves is disguised by 'artistic' projects such as narrative-memoirs. At a deeper level, the fact that the audience participates in this process by refusing to denounce it challenges the legitimacy of the activity. Melville uses the narrator's literary manipulation to do more than delineate typical shared attitudes; the sensitive reader is discomforted, and guided towards protest.





A confrontation between sailors and citizens

J.S.Sleeper *Tales of the Ocean*

'The character of the sailor' 5



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Part One - Destabilising

Part One of *Omoo* is the record of the voyage, the mutiny, and the imprisonment on Tahiti. The key figures are the narrator, and his companion Long Ghost; in this part of the novel, they claim their central role, preparing themselves for their unbridled activities in Part Two. Through our understanding of the mutiny and Round Robin, however, we can appreciate the means by which they secure their power, and also the 'tests' that Melville sets for his audience in permitting them to do so.

Plucked from the Typee valley, the narrator finds himself aboard a whaler, and so back in the centre of the largest industry in the Pacific. But as he portrays it, the *Julia* is unrecognisable as a contemporary whaling vessel, and is modelled more on the stock ship of maritime fiction than on any that was actually then at work. As the Round Robin discloses, the narrator consciously affiliates his narrative to the immensely popular stories of writers such as Maryatt, Kingston, and Cooper.

*Omoo* can be compared at this point with a book such as *Tales of the Ocean and Essays for the Forecastle*, by 'Hawser Martingale', in which long yarns are combined with romanticised pictures of stereotyped sailors and anti-British polemic, to produce a popular illustrated collection:

One afternoon, as the old ship *Arianta* was plunging into a head beat sea, off the Cape of Good Hope, under close-reefed topsails, storm stay-sails and mizzen ... one of the men, who wished to relieve the monotony of the watch, called upon Ned Rollins for something in the shape of a song or story to lend its aid in whiling away the hours until the term of their watch had expired.<sup>7</sup>

*Omoo* also has its standard characters: the landlubber Rope Yarn, the drunken mate Jermin, the Scandinavian mystery figure Dunk, the black cook Baltimore, and the weak captain Paper Jack. Yet, despite its enjoyable

description, like the missionary memoirs, *Tales of the Ocean* is full of political posturing. It is aggressively patriotic, and appeals for seamen's morality in a way that recalls the religious tracts:

The villainy of many of the sailor landlords in our commercial towns is proverbial, so unblushingly odious is their conduct towards seamen ... The landlord of a boarding house for sailors, has it in his power to effect much evil, or much good,

It thus marks itself out as an elitist production; Hawser Martingale is no swashbuckling tar, but J.S.Sleeper, a typical mid-century author.<sup>2</sup>

So while *Omo* coheres with the multi-layered *Tales of the Ocean* extremely well, including traditional humorous elements such as a fight in the forecastle (O 342), a little 'deserved' victimisation, (O 383), or an appalling bath (O 378), in affiliating his narrative to the 'salt sea' genre, the narrator has also imported the political resonances that these conservative works carry. This is good in the sense that it will please the elitist audience, but bad for a narrator who, as we have seen, wishes to conceal his own plastic influence over events. By considering the attitudes embedded in the wider sea-story genre, the sensitive reader can appreciate those embedded in *Omo*'s narration: that the fight in the forecastle is between two rival officers of different status; that the victimisation is in fact oppression; that the captain's bath is designed to reinforce his ineffectuality. As will be seen below (Chapter 6), the ship has traditionally been a stage for symbolic class conflict. Hence there is open political signification in the supposedly 'genial' *Omo*, and in trivialising these topics, the narrator is attempting to hide his role in their manifestation.

This is more obvious once the narrator's alliance with Long Ghost is realised. Like the narrator, the doctor is an elitist presence; together



they represent the audience's values. On this supposedly working vessel: 'Doctor Long Ghost and myself lounged about, cultivating an acquaintance, and gazing upon the shore scenery' (O 347). They treat the life as if all is laid on for their enjoyment, observing the other sailors at work, but doing none themselves: 'My friend Long Ghost had, among other things which looked somewhat strange in a ship's forecastle, a capital spyglass, and on the present occasion we had it in use' (O 349). The narrator and his companion differentiate themselves from the men on grounds of breeding, taste and education: 'As for his learning, he quoted Virgil, and talked of Hobbes of Malmesbury, beside repeating poetry by the canto, especially Hudibras. He was, moreover, a man who had seen the world' (O 336). Together they enjoy a quiet evening game of chess:

Among other devices to kill time, during the frequent calms, Long Ghost hit upon the game of chess ... Of chess, the men could never make head or tail; indeed, their wonder rose to such a pitch, that they at last regarded the mysterious movements of the game with something more than perplexity; and after puzzling them through several long engagements, they came to the conclusion that we must be a couple of necromancers. (O 364)

This is all very pleasant, but should not obscure the fact that the values they typify are those of the capitalist West, ranging from class-bias towards the crew to property speculation:

In addition to these, he had an old file of Sydney papers, and I soon became intimately acquainted with the localities of all the advertising tradesmen there. In particular, the rhetorical flourishes of Stubbs, the real-estate auctioneer, diverted me exceedingly, and I set him down as no other than a pupil of Robins the Londoner. (O 363)

Together, then, the narrator and Long Ghost institute a policy of misrule aboard the *Julia*, in which they quietly impose those values on others, accruing for themselves great power. We have seen how this culminates in the mutiny, but there is a lengthy build-up, beginning with the captain, with whom Long Ghost breaks his earlier friendship once he

realises the crew dislikes Guy. This secures the crew's confidence: 'he vowed he would not live any longer with the captain, and went forward with his chests among the sailors, where he was received with open arms, as a good fellow and an injured man' (O 335-6). The inept skipper now becomes the target of merciless ribaldry. Forced to undergo the humiliating bath, and subjected to cruel wit "Ah! Miss Guy, is that you? now, my dear, go right home, or you'll get hurt" (O 343), he is soon made to deserve his nickname 'Paper Jack'. It is no surprise when on arrival at Tahiti, he leaves the Julia, suggesting that he remain ashore while the ship hunts whales for him: 'Still adhering to his resolution to set the ship at sea in spite of everything, the captain, doubtless, intended to set himself ashore, leaving the vessel under the mate, to resume her voyage at once' (O 397).

None of this process is innocent. While it may appear to be fun, this is only the narrator's presentation; the rightful authority on the ship has been usurped by the doctor's and narrator's policy. They are equally willing to direct it towards other crew members too, like the cook:

The poor old black cook! Unlashing his hammock for the night, and finding a wet log fast asleep in it; and then waking in the morning with his woolly head tarred. Opening his coppers, and finding an old boot boiling away as saucy as could be, and sometimes cakes of pitch candying in his oven, (O 369)

or even the sailors in general:

Ascending from the forecastle on one occasion, he found every soul napping, and forthwith went about his capers. Fastening a rope's end to each sleeper, he rove the lines through a number of blocks, and conducted them all to the windlass; then, by heaving round cheerily, in spite of cries and struggles, he soon had them dangling aloft in all directions by arms and legs. (O 369)

Eventually Long Ghost is no more than a 'Lord of Misrule' with the narrator his chronicler, portraying the events as a typical sea story comedy, and so managing to obscure their own motivational role.

Hardly was his back turned, when a long limb was thrust from a hammock opposite, and Doctor Long Ghost, leaping forth warily, whipped the rope from

Bob's ankle, and fastened it like lightning to a great lumbering chest, the property of the man who had just disappeared.

Scarcely was the thing done, when lo! with a thundering bound, the clumsy box was torn from its fastenings ... (O 370)

This last instance is particularly significant. Long Ghost has here hi-jacked one of the crew's tricks, fastening the rope to a trunk, not Navy Bob as originally intended. This shows that his anarchic effect is beginning to be disseminated. Not only is the captain rendered impotent, but the crew have started to join in Long Ghost's humour rather than doing their work. As a result, they perform as the maritime stereotypes that Long Ghost and the narrator want and authority aboard the *Julia* is consequently dissolved. It is now only a matter of time before this creeping disorder turns into mutiny.

The elitist pair's determinate effect on the mutiny itself has already been seen, but it is important to stress their care in assessing the progress of events and in trying to conceal their own role. For instance, Long Ghost is quick to frustrate the mate's alternative plans:

'I'll tell ye what it is men, If the skipper dies, all agree to obey my orders, and in less than three weeks I'll engage to have five hundred barrels of sperm oil under the hatches; enough to give every mother's son of ye a handful of dollars when we get to Sydney' ... Doctor Long Ghost at once broke in, He said that such a thing was not to be dreamt of ... Every thing forbade the mate's plan, (O 378-9)

Similarly, both men meet to assess the state of the crew:

For my own part, what had lately come to pass was not without its influence, It forcibly brought to mind our really critical condition, Doctor Long Ghost, too, frequently revealed his apprehensions, and once assured me that he would give much to be safely landed upon any island around us. (O 375)

And the narrator speculates over the captain's real influence 'Yet despite his apparent unobtrusiveness, the silent captain had more to do with the men than they thought' (O 334), and comments when he insists on being placed ashore that this showed 'more hardihood' than anything he had done



previously, but that it also 'argued an unaccountable simplicity' (O 397).

This is all evidence of the intention shared by Long Ghost and the narrator to dissolve order. Once the mutiny is past, and they have survived the show-down with the consul, this intention is complete. This last episode is further insight into their processes. The consul tries to return the crew to work by coercing them with the written 'affidavit of John Jermin' (the mate). This ironic parallel of the Round Robin, however, which like that document is selectively silent, is immediately exploded by the Narrator's skilled literary analysis:

Though artfully drawn up, so as to bear hard against every one of us, it was pretty correct in its details; excepting, that it was wholly silent as to the manifold derelictions of the mate himself - a fact which imparted unusual significance to the concluding sentence, 'And furthermore, this deponent sayeth not,' (O 467)

In attempting to support his claim with 'evidence', Wilson has unfortunately been obliged to submit a document which like the Round Robin is a careful fabrication, estranged from its purported source: 'No comments were made, although we looked round for the mate, to see whether it was possible that he could have authorized this use of his name. But he was not present' (O 467). The narrator's pun on 'authorized' underlines that he recognizes the letter as a tactical forgery like his Round Robin; both documents seek to present events in a way that is inconsistent with truth.

By this time, however, the sensitive reader should have begun to repudiate Long Ghost and the narrator, not only to recognise their tactics and charactersitic attitudes. Certainly they are arrogant towards the rest of the crew, which is a matter for censure, but the energy that they release in the mutiny also liberates a rapacious mob among the Tahitians.

The mutineers are initially imprisoned in the 'Calabooza Beretanee',

but they soon circumvent this marginal inconvenience, the narrator by romanticising it, and denying the jail its reality:

It was a beautiful spot. A mountain stream here flowed at the foot of a verdant slope; on one hand, it murmured along until the waters, spreading themselves upon a beach of small, sparkling shells, trickled into the sea; on the other, was a long defile, where the eye pursued a gleaming sinuous thread, lost in shade and verdure, (O 444)

Yet however picturesque the narrator makes the prison, or however much Long Ghost's renewed pranks render its chains irrelevant (O 465), the Calabooza is a significant feature for the Tahitians, because it signifies the island's occupation. It is thus interesting to compare the jailor, Captain Bob, with Mehevi, or any of the Typees:

Bob seldom disposed of the produce of his lands; it was all needed for domestic consumption ...

A friend of Bob's told me, that, owing to his voraciousness, his visits to other parts of the island were much dreaded; for, according to Tahitian customs, hospitality without charge is enjoined upon every one, (O 446-7)

Bob is little more than a libertine, who has been softened into dependence on others; he is not an authoritative figure at all. In an ironic parallel of a significant image in *Typee*, Bob humorously treats his charges as no more than recalcitrant children, a posture in which the narrator connives. In *Typee*, however, the islanders treated Tommo and Toby in this way because they seemed like babies unable to comprehend the valley society, and so showed them how to feed themselves (T 92), or how to wash (T 110). Tommo is aware of the unsettling implications of these actions: 'This over, and resuming my seat, I could not avoid bursting into admiration of the scene around me' (T 111). In contrast, Captain Bob intends only to ingratiate himself with the Western powers - and it is clearly the narrator (who likes the attention) that is dominant:

Captain Bob now bustled about like an old woman seeing the children to bed ... a great counterpane, of coarse, brown 'tappa,' was stretched over the whole party; and, after sundry injunctions to 'moe-moe,' and be good boys - we

were left to ourselves, fairly put to bed and tucked in. (O 445)

Such laxity enables the sailors to begin a career of extortion across the island:

As Captain Bob insensibly remitted his watchfulness, and we began to stroll farther and farther from the Calabooza, we managed, by a systematic foraging upon the country round about, to make up for some of our deficiencies. (O 460)

Roaming at will, they strike up a friendship with French Catholic missionaries (more fun than the English Protestants), and also amorous acquaintances with the Polynesians: 'Gallanting me about, every one was stopped and ceremoniously introduced to Poky's "tayo karhowree nuee" or his particular white friend' (O 481). They also pursue the local women:

Delicious thought! she was moved at the sight of me, I could stand it no longer, but started up, Lo! there she was; her great hazel eyes rounding and rounding in her head, like two stars, her whole frame in a merry quiver, and an expression about the mouth that was sudden and violent death to any thing like sentiment. (O 458)

However, it may seem, this is not great fun; raiding parties are soon organised, and Captain Bob's farm is appropriated as a base:

As we were wholly without resources, so long as we remained on the island no better place than Captain Bob's could be selected for an abiding-place. Beside, we heartily loved the old gentleman, and could not think of leaving him; so, telling him to give no thought as to wherewithal we should be clothed and fed, we resolved, by extending and systematizing our foraging operations, to provide for ourselves. (O 478)

The irony is scarcely concealed beneath the narrator's tone in his description here. It is clear that the islanders are being severely imposed upon by the sailors, and it is thus distressing that the narrator's comments note the effect of intercourse with the West, but attribute 'blame' for it to the islanders themselves:

The really curious way in which all Polynesians are in the habit of making bosom friends at the shortest possible notice, is deserving of remark. Although, among a people like the Tahitians, vitiated as they are by sophisticating influences, this custom has in most cases degenerated into a mere mercenary relation, it nevertheless had its origin in a fine, and in some instances, heroic sentiment, formerly entertained by their fathers. (O 480)



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Despite dressing up to impress in the naval garb from their trunks (O 478-9), the sailors are really no more than a band of brigands engaged in rape and pillage.

What, then, is to be made of this Pacific Tragedy? At a superficial level, accepting the class-representative attitudes of the narrator and Long Ghost, it is possible to see in their rise to power an analogue of the rise of the contemporary elite. By using their talents in a corrupt colonial regime (the *Julia*), a campaign of civil disobedience that paralleled the refusal of the American colonies to pay taxes to Britain led to a revolution and the overthrow of the occupying power (the British consul). Aided by the working-classes (the crew), and by complicit Indians (the Tahitians), this elitist bourgeoisie usurped authority, hiding its own involvement by producing a legitimising narrative (the narrator's story). Part One now ends, and Part Two will be played out according to the rules of concealment and consumption that have been instituted by the pair's previous activity. - While this may seem far-fetched, I think the suggestion is at least possible.

It is, however, buried quite deeply, especially for the contemporary audience, so I shall concentrate in these comments on a number of issues which I feel were designed for the first readers' contemplation. This reintroduces the notion of the 'test' which Melville was setting for both audience and narrator (as in the dance). Thus certain elements were included that should have produced outcry. The first is the sailors' involvement with the French missionaries, a relationship that is presented as being very close:

The interest felt in Pat's welfare, by his benevolent countryman, was very serviceable to the rest of us; especially as we all turned Catholics, and went

to mass every morning, much to Captain Bob's consternation. (0472)

Contrast this with the actual comments of one of the Tahitian Protestant missionaries on his Roman brethren, who described them as 'unreasonable, ungentlemanly, and un-Christian'. Or compare it with William Ellis' description of Catholic worship: 'one of the most absurd and fatal delusions which the powers of darkness ever invented for the destruction of mankind'.<sup>10</sup> Both of these men represent the standard nineteenth-century Protestant reaction to Catholicism. Moreover, it must be remembered that the massively powerful American religious organisations (with their Protestant British affiliates), consistently opposed Catholic involvement in the Pacific - a very live issue now that Tahiti was under French protection. Consequently, the friendship of the sailors and the Roman missionaries in *Omoa* is massively controversial. And yet, it seems to have drawn little review comment. (The reviewer who did opine on the Catholic priests as 'sleek and oily gentlemen' also castigated the Protestants who: 'warn the dusky sinners, in tones of thunder, to abandon their pagan idols and heathenish rites or they cannot be saved' - he challenges all missionaries, not just the French. (New York *Evening Mirror* 21 May 1847). The point here, then, is that first readers seem to have colluded in 'enjoying' the narrator's tale, and so to have suppressed their moral scruples.

This is also true of the second 'test', which is the mutiny. Although a mutiny is a stock novelistic component, the reality behind the motif was still obviously anathema to the contemporary elite. After the famous Somers affair, in which the naval-cadet son of the Secretary for War (among others) was hanged following a dubiously constituted court-martial (in which Melville's cousin Guert Gansevoort was a judge), the

nation was in a complete state of shock: 'the Somers affair caused a national scandal. It was front-page news for months in New York City newspapers'.<sup>11</sup> While there is a great difference between a naval mutiny and this one on an insignificant whaler, it should be recognized that industrial protest of all kinds was anathematized in the nineteenth-century U.S.A., and was frequently ended by force.<sup>12</sup> For a mutiny involving elitist presences (or led by elitist presences, as I have suggested) to be treated as fun, says much for the manipulative power of fiction, and for the audience's connivance in its 'entertainment'. A study of contemporary reviews of *Omo* supports this verdict of critical quiescence. There is one pejorative remark about the mutiny in the *National Intelligencer* (26 May 1847). But another critic said that *Typee* and *Omo* were 'the best works on Polynesian life yet published', and that *Omo* was 'full of fun and desperately mutinous' (*New York Evening Mirror* 21 May 1847).

In other words, audience, critics, and narrator all chose to suppress the truth of the real situation in the Pacific by substituting the narrator's narrative instead. Only Melville's subversion, and the sensitive reader who can scrutinise the narrator and discern the author's activity, register any dissent against this false representation. Most people, such as this reviewer, enjoyed the 'happy romp', and so overlooked the licentiousness, racism, mutiny, theft and religious imperialism. If this is true, the Pacific was treated as a tabula rasa for Western fantasy:

We happened, like the vast majority of readers here and abroad, to read *Omo* with feelings of unmixed delight; we shared in the exuberant jollity of the venturesome and careless sailors, and wandered a life of boyish holiday over the sunny groves of the coral islands. In our mind, the illusion was perfect, and the incidents and scenes were as vivid and natural as ever words painted. (*New York Evening Mirror* 21 July 1847)



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Part Two - Reintegration

Part Two begins with some more tests for the audience, followed by a further exemplification of the narrator's strategy, and then in Imeeo there is the dance, and the events that we have already considered.

First comes the narrator's new 'friendship'. Kooloo, is described as a 'comely youth, quite a buck in his way', but it is said that 'after sponging me well' he 'played the part of a retrograde lover' (O 483). This falsely suggests that the sailors have been unfairly treated: 'so remiss did they become in their attentions, that we could no longer rely upon their bringing us the daily supply of food, which all of them had faithfully promised' (O 483). More significantly, it presents the audience with a clearly homoerotic relationship: 'He was, alas! as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal; one of those who make no music unless the clapper be silver' (O 483 see 1Cor.13). Thus the narrator presents homoeroticism as if it is a stock novelistic subject. This was surely not the case in the nineteenth-century; despite the narrator's tone it was taboo in polite society. Again, however, there was no critical outrage. So we must conclude that the readers accepted this sexual exploitation of 'savage' islanders - it may have added to their quaintness - and that they attributed no blame to the Westerners, who so exploited their hosts. This is true despite the fact that some of the Europeans clearly distanced themselves from the sailors:

Prejudiced against us by the malevolent representations of the consul and others, many worthy foreigners ashore regarded us as a set of lawless vagabonds; though, truth to speak, better behaved sailors never stepped on the island, nor who gave less trouble to the natives. But, for all this, whenever we met a respectably dressed European, ten to one he shunned us, by going over to the other side of the road. (O 492)

Did the elitist American audience suppress moral qualms through patriotic loyalty to their narrator?

The next test concerns attitudes to church. The sailors decide to humiliate the consul during the service, but it is more church-attendance itself that is being debunked than just the consul:

Before the chests were quite empty, we had a grand washing in the stream of our best raiment, for the purpose of looking tidy, and visiting the European chapel in the village ... It was an energetic discourse, and the pulpit cushion was well pounded. Occupying a high seat in the synagogue, and stiff as a flag-staff, was our beloved guardian, Wilson. I shall never forget his look of wonder when his interesting wards filed in at the doorway, and took up a seat directly facing him. (O 484)

This episode leads to the narrator's exploitation of another literary genre in the assembly of his narrative. Perhaps motivated by the awareness that the riot he has helped to unleash could alienate him from his audience (though of course this didn't happen), he acts at his most representative, plays the role of the conventional travel memoirist, and describes 'Tahiti As It Is'.

In an attempt to understand (as he says), the nature and effect of the Tahitian missions, the narrator characteristically quotes from a number of works which deal with the subject, and concludes despite the missionaries' efforts: 'That the immorality alluded to is continually increasing' (O 514). Hedged around with disclaimers, such comments could be seen as criticism of the missionary project:

But in the first place, let it be distinctly understood, that in all I have to say upon this subject, both here and elsewhere, I mean no harm to the missionaries nor their cause, I merely desire to set forth things as they actually exist. (O 510)

Nevertheless, the relative acclaim accorded *Omo*, despite its purported disagreement with the missionaries, indicates that this situation should not be over-simplified. A reading of the sources used indicates that the

narrator has referred to them only selectively, and that they do not at all express the simple criticism that he suggests.

Bishop Russell, for instance, certainly agrees that there is much yet to be done; but from a position of assured Western dominance and implied superiority, he stresses that the changes are necessary and inevitable:

In those remote establishments the savage has been seen to rise, as it were by a single effort, from the lowest condition in which human nature is ever found, to the erect posture of a civilized being; from the worship of the most contemptible idols to a veneration of the true God; and from habits of the grossest barbarism to the pursuit of rational knowledge and the love of refined enjoyment.<sup>13</sup>

For him, Polynesian genocide may be 'regrettable', but it is not a matter that necessitates a revision of one's own attitudes or policies:

... in all parts of the world where Europeans have been permitted to establish colonies, the natives have gradually disappeared, losing at once their name and their inheritance ... There seems to be a certain incompatibility between the tastes of the savage and the pursuits of the civilised man, which, by a process more easily marked than explained, leads in the end to the extinction of the former. The primitive inhabitants of America, both North and South, continue to decrease, even under the benign influence of institutions calculated to promote their welfare ... and we fear that ... Polynesia will not be an exception.

Likewise, Captain Beechey does remark on the immorality of contemporary Tahitians, but he fails to observe the culpability of Westerners in introducing alcohol, and he himself enjoys an illegal dancing and drinking session in the queen's hut. For him, as for so many others, Tahiti should be only a Westernized tropical playground, offering excellent amenities such as: 'a delightful walk along the shore in the refreshing coolness'.<sup>14</sup> Otto Kotzebue, also, may denounce Protestant missionaries, but he does so partly as a polemical tool in his wish to secure Russian influence with the queen.<sup>15</sup> And even Daniel Wheeler, who is a genuinely humble anti-imperialist, cannot possibly consider leaving the indigenous culture un-Christianised:



For the last three days, at intervals, the prospect of attending the native meeting this morning has been heavy and humiliating; but there seemed no other way of clearing my mind, and of being at liberty to leave the island, than by standing resigned, and willing to be anything or nothing; to go or to stay, according to the good pleasure of that holy will.<sup>16</sup>

These are the authors from whom the narrator quotes, and none are as sceptical about the missionary project as he likes to suggest. Thus he has selected his evidence, according to the way that <sup>he</sup> wishes to shape his own narrative. All the writers share with him an innate belief in Western hegemony over the 'savages' among whom they have come:

Added to this, is a quality inherent in Polynesians; and more akin to hypocrisy than anything else. It leads them to assume the most passionate interest, in matters for which they really feel little or none whatever; but in which, those who <sup>to</sup> power they dread, or whose favour they court, they believe to be at all affected, (O 501)

Paradoxically, his posture of relative scepticism about the missionaries is a way of reinforcing his authority with his audience. Although there was widespread elite support for the missionary endeavour, alignment of his narrative with 'informed' comment enabled the narrator to stress his reliability as an observer, and so to excuse any 'excesses' that may have been noted in his own scandalous behaviour.

Just in case anyone was disconcerted with this new-found factuality, however, the narrator and his friend decide to jettison the rest of the sailors, and under the cover of night, embark for Imeeo, and work on a plantation. Another literary convention is also employed here, the romantic/humorous tradition of the picaresque novel. But the legacy of Cervantes is less important than the necessity to give the elitist audience relief from the previous description; and so this episode is best read as satire at the expense of lower-class stereotypes:

'Wall, b'ys' (boys), said Zeke, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, after breakfast - 'we must get at it. Shorty, give Peter there (the doctor), the big hoe, and Paul the other, and let's be off' ... For a moment left alone in the house, we looked at each other, quaking. We were each equipped with a

great, clumsy piece of a tree, armed at one end with a heavy, flat mass of iron, (O 532)

The narrator and his friend recoil in horror from the manual labour, and so organise the excursion inland: "Mercy!" ejaculated the doctor, rising slowly, and turning round. "He'll be the death of us!" ... Looking at the doctor, I perceived very plainly, that he had decided upon something' (O 534). After a little flattery their agitation succeeds, and Zeke and Shorty are made to appear as ignorant dolts:

Upon informing Zeke of these matters, he seemed highly flattered with the opinion we entertained of his reputation abroad; and he agreed to oblige us ... With a rooster's quill, therefore, a bit of soiled paper, and a stout heart, he set to work, (O 578)

This comic interlude is the prelude to the dance in Tamai, and the journey to Partoowye, Queen Pomare's retreat. In Partoowye, the travellers hope to find a life commensurate with their ideas of their status:

Nor was this expectation altogether Quixotic. In the train of many Polynesian princes, roving whites are frequently found; gentlemen pensioners of state, basking in the tropical sunshine of the court, and leading the pleasantest lives in the world, (O 574)

Yet this island nirvana is another product of the narrator's judicious presentation, and the sensitive reader should immediately be suspicious of the sailors' welcome:

Going to a chest filled with various European articles, she took out two suits of new sailor frocks and trowsers; and presenting them with a gracious smile, pushed us behind a calico screen, and left us. Without any fastidious scruples, we donned the garments; and what with the meal, the nap, and the bath, we now came forth like a couple of bridegrooms, (O 608)

Note the sense of propriety and Westernized 'civilization' in the reception. The house is perfectly fitted for cultured leisure, even being provided with a stock of Smollett novels. In many respects, Po-Po is the ideal islander of elitist Western aspirations:

Before retiring, the entire household gathered upon the floor; and in their midst, he read aloud a chapter from a Tahitian Bible. Then kneeling with the

rest of us, he offered up a prayer. Upon its conclusion, all separated without speaking, (O 609)

Christian, ordered, settled - is Partoowye paradise at last?

But of course, the narrator's description is scant with the truth.

It is designed to stimulate and accord with the audience's fantasy:

The damsel was reclining on the ferns; one hand supporting her cheek, and the other listlessly turning over the leaves of a Tahitian Bible. The doctor approached, (O 623)

Such indolent island cosmopolitanism is not a happy picture while Tahiti is in the grip of French occupation; nor is the narrator's description of Queen Pomare:

The whole scene was a strange one; but what most excited our surprise, was the incongruous assemblage of the most costly objects from all quarters of the globe. Cheek by jowl, they lay beside the rudest native articles, without the slightest attempt at order. While we were amusing ourselves in this museum of curiosities, our conductor plucked us by the sleeve, and whispered 'Pomaree! Pomaree! aramai kow kow!' (O 639-640)

The palace, to which the sailors have to bribe an entry, is portrayed as a 'curiosity', in a way that is reminiscent of Tommo's treatment of Marnoo (T 162). Pomare's home, like Marnoo's body, becomes a contemporary 'museum':

All the articles first mentioned, were, doubtless, presents from foreign powers. They were more or less injured; the fowling-pieces and swords were rusted; the finest woods were scratched; and a folio volume of Hogarth lay open, with a cocoa-nut shell of some musty preparation capsized among the miscellaneous furniture of the Rake's apartment, (O 640)

This is a trivialisation of the signs of foreign flattery, designed to bemuse the reader. No significance is attributed to the fact that the 'gifts' are all damaged, or that the room is disordered. The queen herself, moreover, is misrepresented: 'She was about ordinary size, rather matronly; her features not very handsome; her mouth, voluptuous; but there was a care-worn expression in her face, probably attributable to her late misfortunes. From her appearance, one would judge her about forty; but



she is not so old' (O 640). This suggests an ineffectual dowdiness which is belied by Pomare's doggedly consistent refusal of French occupation and rebuttal of all the Western powers. Her letters to Queen Victoria, written as an equal, testify to her courage:

My elder sister and Queen, behold, I am yours. Stretch forth your powerful arm and save me. Overshadow me that I may respire for my breath is spent in this struggle - I am near confinement and am much discomforted by the smallness of this vessel. I now fasten again the rope which has connected us. Do you not cut it. You are powerful to save,  
Your sister in captivity: Pomare<sup>17</sup>

The narrator suggests that in contrast with his host Pomare deserves her treatment because she is 'backward', and she is also debased by being juxtaposed with the narrator's (equally selective) portrayal of her Marquesan bodyguard:

In my frequent conversations with him over the bamboo rampart, I found this islander a philosopher of nature - a wild heathen, moralizing upon the vices and follies of the Christian court of Tahiti - a savage, scorning the degeneracy of the people among whom fortune had thrown him. (O 637)

If the audience agrees to this presentation, it will have conspired with the narrator in the creation, reception, and consumption of a fallacious record of life in the Pacific.

To shield this deceptive picture from exposure, almost immediately after visiting Pomare, the travellers decide to return to sea. The narrator gains employment on another whaler, but the captain refuses to take Long Ghost, so the narrative closes with one friend starting a new voyage, and the other left in Partoowye. In the conclusion of the story, Melville offers a final chance for the audience to recognise, and reject, the narrator's misrepresentative narrative.

When he describes his prospective captain, it is clear that this man is the antithesis of Paper Jack:

He was an uncommonly tall, robust, fine-looking man, in the prime of life. There was a deep crimson spot in the middle of each sun-burnt cheek, doubtless

the effect of his sea potations. He was a Vineyarder, or native of the island of Martha's Vineyard (adjoining Nantucket), and - I would have sworn it - a sailor, and no tyrant, (O 642)

He exhibits all the qualities of a stout American (as opposed to those of 'Sydney gentry' O 643):

'Here, Mai-Mai!' he cried 'another bottle!' And, when it came, with one stroke of a knife, he summarily beheaded it, and commanded me to drain it to the bottom. He then told me, that if I would come on board his vessel the following morning, I would find the ship's articles on the cabin transom, (O 644)

So in seeking employment on the *Leviathan*, the narrator is finally revoking any Typee vestiges, eschewing Pacific indolence, and claiming his position in his own society; his transition Westwards is complete.

This is because whaling, the most important industry in the U.S. at this time, was also that occupation which with preaching, spearheaded Western expansion in the Pacific. While colonial governments were weak, the whale fleets brought crowds to the islands. In 1834 there were 2,000 British settlers in New Zealand, but 9,000 U.S. whalers in ships off the New Zealand coast. Moreover, the fleets had a huge economic influence; their demand for meat led to the introduction of ranching on Hawaii, and sugar, cotton, tobacco, and other supply industries followed them across the ocean.<sup>18</sup> Thus although whaling was 'discreditable' as lower class, it is a suitably 'Western' occupation for the narrator; it stresses his patriotism and reinforces the bonds that he has been claiming with his readers, through acknowledging shared economic objectives.

However, the new captain totally refuses to ship Long Ghost, and very interestingly, the narrator scarcely protests about this, while the doctor does not protest at all:

I forthwith made an adroit allusion to my long friend. But it was worse than useless. The Vineyarder swore he would have nothing to do with him - he (my long friend) was a 'bird' from Sydney, and nothing would make him (the man of little faith) believe otherwise. Upon informing the doctor of the result of

the interview, he was greatly amused; and laughingly declared, that the Vineyarder must be a penetrating fellow. (O 644-5)

Why should they be so half-hearted after such good times together?

One reason could be that the narrator's newly decisive, aggressively acquisitive mood lies badly with the doctor's laziness; but this is only a partial answer. Consider the doctor's send-off:

It was a mad, merry night among the sailors; they had to tap a small cask of wine, procured in the same way as the doctor's flasks.

An hour or two after midnight, every thing was noiseless; but when the first streak of dawn showed itself over the mountains, a sharp voice hailed the fore-castle, and ordered the ship unmoored ... Presently we 'hove to', and the canoes came alongside to take off the islanders who had accompanied us thus far. As he stepped over the side, I shook the doctor long and heartily by the hand. I have never seen or heard of him since. (O 646)

This is the most romanticised of all partings. After a night of laughter and drink, they separate for ever in the first light of the new day. Consistent with the narrator's inevitable romanticism, it is almost as if Long Ghost has been vaporized from the narrative.

Yet when added to the whimsical comment about the captain's 'penetration', is there not an air of exaggeration that undercuts the doctor's status in the text? Has the captain seen what the doctor himself acknowledges; that he is actually no more than the narrator's 'pretext' - a foil whom he can manipulate, in order to achieve his desired goals? In this light, the doctor is only another of the narrator's stratagems like the sea-story or travel genres. These all further his purposes by ingratiating him with his audience and propelling him Westward, as elements in his narrative of concealment and consumption. Once the narrator's goals have been attained, and he has been reintegrated into the gainful, American life aboard the *Leviathan*, neither Long Ghost nor the narrative itself is any longer required. Both are thus accorded a wonderful romantic departure and then simply 'folded up'.



In demonstrating that Long Ghost (the comic side-kick) is, however, only another dispensable stereotype, the narrator advertises his processes in the same way that he does in the Round Robin. - If we are sensitive to his narrative exploitation, we are able to hold him up to scrutiny, as Melville desires that we should. The ending of the story is the author's final subversive exposure of his narrator's artfulness and duplicity.

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#### Reception - Collusion in Legitimation

I have stressed above the 'alliance' between Melville's narrator, the reviewers of his narrative, and his audience (both contemporary and modern). By refusing to challenge the narrator's misrepresentation of events in the Pacific in the mid-nineteenth-century, they colluded in that false portrayal. Melville is suggesting that this literary conspiracy was one of the ways in which imperialist activity was justified and legitimised. The warm welcome that was accorded the narrator's story substituted his false romanticism as canonical for the true record of spoliation and extortion. It is in this substitution that 'legitimation' occurs. And yet, as we have seen, the narrative itself is continually subverted and exposed by the author, and thus opened up as the basis for dissent. Did no-one recognise this point?

Of course, not every review of *Omo* was laudatory. Nevertheless, the novel's high sales, and the favourable comments of most critics, testify that those who did observe the 'immorality' of the narrative and remark on it openly were in the minority. Watson Branch comments:

*Typee* and *Omoo* served through the rest of the nineteenth century as a touchstone for judging later books on the Polynesian Islands. As the London *Athenaeum* wrote (11 November 1854), 'Every place, sooner or later, finds its voice, - finds somebody to paint it to the eyes of cultivated, speculative Europe - to furnish a picture of it which, according to the skill of the artist, remains its "ideal" for generations more or less numerous.' *Typee* and *Omoo* did this for America as well as for Europe.'\*

This seems an accurate assessment of the impact that the novels had; the elite's literary 'guardians' did generally conspire to overlook the incidents which I have suggested were offered for their repudiation, according to their own value systems. We know this is true because there were a few contradictory voices. By attending to these, we can appreciate the suppression that most reviewers deployed. Moreover, we can refute any suggestion that Melville was himself an elitist whose standards sometimes 'lapsed', or who was 'naive' in his writing. The 'gap' between Melville and his subverted representative narrator is not a critical fiction.

Periodicals under the direct control of Protestant religious organisations were obviously antagonistic: 'a tissue of uninformed ... prejudiced ignorance, and of hostility', wrote W.O.Bourne (*New York Tribune* 2 Oct 1847). But some also noticed an important feature:

These lively sketches steal one's favor and approbation in spite of himself [sic,]. They are so graphic and spirited, and narrate scenes of such strange and surpassing interest, that the reader is borne along through the checkered history, without stopping to inquire how much is true or false, or what reliance is to be placed on the author's most deliberate statements. But on arriving at the end and looking back, the conviction speedily arises that it is but little else than romance. Its only merit is what a well-told tale, founded on some Polynesian facts, would have. The author's mendacity is sometimes flagrantly visible, as well as his spite against religion and its missionaries. (*Evangelist* 27 May 1847)

Here the reviewer recognizes the narrator's almost mesmeric power. Perhaps impelled by the awareness that Melville was attacking the missionaries, this commentator is led to question the whole structure of the narrative. Although there is a refusal to transfer these doubts to

other issues such as the mutiny, or the exactions demanded from the islanders, there is clearly unease about the narrator's intentions.

A more extensive consideration is found in the long essay on *Omoo* by the Whig writer George Washington Peck, critic for the *American Review*. He also repudiates the narrator's apparent anti-missionary stance, saying of these people whom he knows personally: 'Men do not change their natures by sailing a few thousand miles over the rotundity of this orb'. Nevertheless, he does not refute indiscriminately, and in fact assumes the 'balanced' attitude which I have suggested was actually the narrator's: 'we are ourselves forced to believe the accounts of the good missionaries have effected in far countries exaggerated'. Yet Peck, like the reviewer quoted above, is fascinated by *Omoo's* contradictory qualities:

The reckless spirit which betrays itself on every page of the book - the cool, sneering wit, and the perfect want of *heart* everywhere manifested in it, make it repel, almost as much as its voluptuous scenery-painting and its sketchy outlines of stories attract. It is curious to observe how much difficulty the newspapers have had in getting at these causes of dislike. They are evidently not pleased with the book; but - as most writers would, sitting down to write a hasty notice of it immediately after running it through - the daily critics find nothing worse to say respecting it than that they do not believe it. (*American Review* July 1847)

Here Peck is slightly unfair about other reviews, but he does identify the central problem which at least these contemporary critics found: how could someone who writes with all the marks of an elitist also be involved in these disreputable activities? He says that the narrator has written 'a very attractive and readable book', that he is 'very capable of using a great style', and that he is 'a native of a Christian land, well-educated, and with a fair reputation for truth and veracity'; but that he also acts with dubious morality. Eventually he has to rate him as only a 'juvenile offender' in the ranks of authors when compared with French novelists. - *Omoo* has clearly caused him great difficulty to review. Another



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conservative critic, Horace Greeley, has exactly the same reaction, saying it 'proves the author a born genius', but 'the tone is bad' (New York *Weekly Tribune* 23 June 1847).

Each of these reviews is very perceptive. They illustrate precisely Melville's intention in producing *Omoo* in the way that he did. When confronted with a narrator who seems to be the elitist reviewers' own counterpart in the text, and yet who in some things behaves contrary to form, the reviewers examine their representative's behaviour. Moreover, they include the narrator's style and rhetoric within their scrutiny. Hence they intuit precisely what I have been stressing - that there is a disparity between the representative nature of the narrator and the activities in which he indulges. While the narrator writes as a typical elitist, he acts ostensibly as a dissolute wanderer. Melville wishes us to interrogate this gulf between words and actions as they are presented for us. Could it be that the elitist narrator and the dissolute wanderer are one?

Most reviewers did not choose to admit openly whether they had recognised this alarming possibility, and in any case they all retreated from fully embracing its implications. Consequently, the foundations of the 'genial' *Omoo* tradition were laid, and in a few years any of those early doubts were forgotten:

O author of *Typee* and *Omoo*, we admire so cordially the proven capacity of your pen, that we entreat you to doff the 'non-natural sense' of your late lucubrations - to put off your worser self - and to do your better, real self, that justice which its 'potentiality' deserves. (*New Monthly Magazine* July 1853)

Here the writer urges Melville to abandon novels such as *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre* and produce again 'un-problematic' works like his first books. This demonstrates the way that *Omoo* was subsumed to an imperialist tradition

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which it was designed to frustrate, and became itself part of the 'real life evidence' about the Pacific. The fact that the book was intended to be a disconcerting reading experience, and that it was disconcerting for some of its first readers is simply denied. Nevertheless, even the marginal amount of reflection that Melville had managed to provoke illustrated that the reading process could be used subversively, and so the author was not disillusioned as he began his next novel, in which derangement of the audience was an even more central preoccupation.

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## *MARDI*

'The drifting and eddyng fog of  
intellectual worry, vacillation, and  
indecision.'

Newton Arvin.



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Introduction

*Mardi*, Melville's third novel, was published in March and April 1849. It exploits both the analysis of Western activities in the Pacific which had featured so strongly in *Typee* and *Omoo* and the textual techniques of those books, but he now turns for his subject-matter largely to his own capitalist society. *Mardi* is Melville's first attempt to pass judgment on the West.

Thus Melville continues the systematic approach which was both advertised and denied in the Preface to *Omoo*. The Preface to *Mardi* similarly accepts and refutes the new novel's relationship with its precursor; the implied author seems to expect an acquaintance with the previous work, and yet wishes to frustrate any prospective reader's anticipations:

Not long ago, having published two narratives of voyages in the Pacific, which, in many quarters were received with incredulity, the thought occurred to me, of indeed writing a romance of Polynesian adventure, and publishing it as such; to see whether, the fiction might not, possibly, be received for a verity; in some degree the reverse of my previous experience. (N 661)

A similar tension can be discerned in the letter that Melville sent to John Murray, in which he is at once defensive and bullish:

To be blunt; the work I shall next publish will <be> in downright earnest [be] a "Romance of Polynesian Adventure" - But why this? The truth is, Sir, that the reiterated imputation of being a romancer in disguise has at last pricked me into a resolution to show those who may take any interest in the matter, that a *real* romance of mine is no *Typee* or *Omoo*, & is made of different stuff altogether. (Letters No 49, 25 March 1848)

These comments affirm *Mardi*'s distinctive relationship to *Typee* and *Omoo*. It is from this relationship that I shall consider the novel.

The story begins with a narrator who is a whaleman on the *Arcturion* (not the *Leviathan*, on which the narrator of *Omoo* had embarked). With a

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companion, Jarl, he jumps ship rather than hunt Right whales. Having spent some time in an open boat, the *Chamois*, where they are becalmed and run short of provisions, they board an apparently abandoned brigantine, but far from being deserted, the *Parki* is the home of two Polynesians, Samoa and Annatoo. After various adventures, which culminate in Annatoo's death, they once more resort to the *Chamois*. They now strike land, and meet an island canoe, in which the narrator discovers a white maiden, Yillah. Releasing her from 'pagan' hands (and killing some of her captors in the process), they set off again, and Yillah's story is recounted. They eventually come ashore, are surrounded by a crowd of islanders, and the narrator, having been hailed as a demi-god, Taji, accepts his new identity. He lives for a while in happiness with Yillah, but one day she disappears. Taji attributes this disappearance either to the jealousy of Hautia, queen of a distant island, or to the vengeance of three of Yillah's original captors. Both of these groups of people pursue him as he sails out around the islands (Mardi), in search of his lost love, accompanied on his voyage by Media, the king of Odo, the island on which he has been living; the king's philosopher, Babbalanja; his historian, Mohi; and his poet, Yoomy. Together they visit many islands, including some which would have been directly identifiable for the nineteenth-century audience. They drink much wine, and talk late into the night, but Yillah cannot be found. The travellers eventually arrive at Serenia, an island where Babbalanja has a vision of perfect peace, and decides to stay. Taji rejects this choice, and visits Queen Hautia, from whom he learns that Yillah is dead. Sending Mohi and Yoomy back to Serenia, and having heard that Media has returned to quell a rebellion at home, Taji decides to flee Mardi, and is last seen sailing out into the open ocean, still pursued by the avengers.

1) *Typee* and *Omoo* as determinants

The above is a blank summary of the novel's action; to gain any purchase on it, we must return to its relationship with its predecessors. James Jubak asserts that *Mardi* was heavily influenced by the dominant genre employed in *Typee* and *Omoo*:

Melville began his career by writing travel literature, fictionalized or not, and *Mardi* in its developmental form illustrates some of the ways in which that first genre affected or suggested aspects of Melville's more mature work.'

This emphasises the novel's dependency on the preconceptions established by *Typee*, and supports the view that *Mardi* 'began' as travel/sea story, shifting to satire and the 'world of mind' (M 1214) as its writing progressed. Such an organicist stance has been widely accepted ever since the publication of Merrell Davis' *Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage*.<sup>2</sup> It maintains the influence of Melville's reading during the composition of the book, especially as he encountered the works of Rabelais and Thomas Browne.

Yet as I noticed above, the author was himself slightly coy about the relationship between *Mardi* and the first two novels. In *Typee* and *Omoo*, Melville as author utilised the conventions of travel narrative (together with missionary narrative and sea story) to anatomise the sponsoring attitudes and processes of Western imperialism in the Pacific. A central feature in this textual analysis was the representative narrator, who both typified those attitudes, and became a focus for the expression of authorial dissent. In a sense, then, *Typee* and *Omoo* essayed two general goals: a) the delineation of elitist attitudes; b) their subversion in the process of reading. It is this that is the context in which *Mardi* was produced, not Melville's intellectual 'unfolding', as Davis suggests.



I shall propose below that the narrator of *Mardi* whom we encounter in the first chapters is a similar elitist construct to Tommo and the narrator of *Omoo*. More obviously than theirs, however, his narrative becomes the object of disruption. What was implicit in *Typee* and *Omoo* is explicit in *Mardi*; the narrator's narrative is incoherent and flawed. Different voices challenge the narrator's for primacy. Episodes occur that fracture his supposedly controlled narration, revealing to the sensitive audience the attitudes and processes at work in the society that he represents. Obviously, this is only a matter of degree - such tensions were apparent in the earlier novels - but in *Mardi* they are even more clearly so. This may be the reason why Melville in his letter to Murray sought to problematize the relationship between *Mardi* and the previous work.

*Typee* and *Omoo* are the model in reaction to which *Mardi* is formed. They establish the voice and function of the narrator and yet they also intimate the author's dissent. While in them the emphasis seems to be on the delineation, in *Mardi* it is more on the dissent. Based on our awareness of them, Melville's strategy in his new book can be appreciated.

#### ii) The Narrator

The narrator of *Mardi* is a self-aware elitist presence, whose class affiliation is denoted by his voice and views. Whether or not he is a direct continuation of the narrator of *Omoo*, in losing his predecessor's renewed zeal for work he still declares his kinship with him:

Ay, ay, Arcturion! I say it in no malice, but thou wast exceedingly dull. Not only at sailing; hard though it was, that I could have borne; but in every other respect. The days went slowly round and round, endless and

uneventful as cycles in space. (M 665)

This recalls the early pages of *Omoo*, before the pranks begin, while the suggestion that whaling should be entertainment, not labour, is reminiscent of the elegant chess games aboard the *Julia*:

To the uninitiated in the business of whaling, my feelings at this juncture may perhaps be hard to understand. But this much let me say: that Right whaling on the Nor'-West Coast, in chill and dismal fogs, the sullen inert monsters rafting the sea all round like Hartz forest logs on the Rhine, and submitting to the harpoon like half-stunned bullocks to the knife; this horrid and indecent Right whaling, I say, compared to a spirited hunt for the gentlemanly Cachalot in southern and more genial seas, is as the butchery of white bears upon blank Greenland icebergs to zebra hunting in Caffraria, where the lively quarry bounds before you through leafy glades. (M 666)

Here is another cultured narrator, whose deference to his audience neatly complements his ambivalence towards the poorly educated captain:

There were other things, also, tending to make my lot on ship-board very hard to be borne. True, the skipper himself was a trump; stood upon no quarter-deck dignity; and had a tongue for a sailor. Let me do him justice, furthermore; he took a sort of fancy for me in particular; was sociable, nay, loquacious, when I happened to stand at the helm. But what of that? Could he talk sentiment or philosophy? Not a bit. His library was eight inches by four; Bowditch and Hamilton Moore. (M 665)

The condescension in the narrator's tone here demonstrates his belief that the captain should recognise his qualities, even if for him society with the captain was unrewarding. This uneasy social contract underpins the narrator's claim that to go Right whaling voids the 'legal' settlement between employer and employee. While we might doubt that this was the case, the narrator's explanation is clearly intended to impress an educated audience: 'Now, this most unforeseen determination on the part of my captain to measure the arctic circle was nothing more nor less than a tacit contravention of the agreement between us' (M 666). This is similar in objective to the 'bravado' (M 667) with which the narrator accepts the captain's challenge to leave the ship if he can; both aim to reinforce the

bonds between the narrator and his audience, thereby involving the audience in the promise of adventure. 'We', it should be noted, are included in the narrator's reasoning: 'It's worth noticing, this way we all have of pondering for ourselves the enterprise, which, for others, we hold a bagatelle' (M 667). Thus it is implied that we, as audience, are complicit in his adventure, and relish its promise:

In the distance what visions were spread! The entire western horizon high piled with gold and crimson clouds; airy arches, domes, and minarets; as if the yellow, Moorish sun were setting behind some vast Alhambra. Vistas seemed leading to worlds beyond. (M 668)

This first chapter of the novel is thus to revive the narrator/audience alliance which has been so crucial to previous Melville productions. Judging by the many reviews which, as this one, saw these early chapters as 'in the style of *Omoo* and *Typee* - books which made the multitude crazy with delight', the narrator is successful in his project.<sup>2</sup> Yet as I have previously shown, this alliance, which establishes the presence of the representative narrator, entails that that presence is class-specific. The narrator is the emissary of elitist values in the text. This is apparent throughout the opening of the narrative, as some further examples demonstrate.

For instance, the barely controlled condescension with which the narrator regards the captain becomes obvious class-bias towards his fellow escapee, Jarl:

True to his calling, the Skyeman was very illiterate; witless of Salamanca, Heidelberg, or Brazen-Nose; in Delhi, had never turned over the books of the Brahmins. (M 673)

Jarl's only redeeming quality is that 'he loved me' (M 674), and thus that he was willing to act as personal servant:

Unsolicited, he was my laundress and tailor; a most expert one, too; and when at meal-times my turn came round to look out at the mast-head, or stand at the wheel, he catered for me among the "kids" in the forecastle with unwearied



assiduity, (M 675)

The narrator then admits that he was known aboard ship by 'a sort of drawing-room title', and that this only advertised truth:

It was because of something in me that could not be hidden; stealing out in an occasional polysyllable; an otherwise incomprehensible deliberation in dining; remote, unguarded allusions to Belles-Lettres affairs; and other trifles superfluous to mention, (M 674)

And because of all of this, the narrator requires Jarl to accompany him on his 'adventure': 'as for inducing another to join me, it seemed a precaution so indispensable, as to outweigh all other considerations' (M 677).

With Jarl, the narrator's attitudes become clear. He is arrogant, elitist, and self-regarding. His vexation at Jarl's silence when they are becalmed in the middle of the Pacific with rapidly reducing provisions is conclusive demonstration of his class bias. It is also reminiscent of the way that Tommo's similar attitudes - his refusal of exchange - were exposed when the travellers were first confronted by the Typees on Nukuhiva:

But at times how wearisome to me these everlasting reveries in my one solitary companion. I longed for something enlivening; a burst of words; human vivacity of one kind or other. After in vain essaying to get something of this sort out of Jarl, I tried it all by myself; playing upon my body as upon an instrument; singing, halloing, and making empty gestures, till my Viking stared hard; and I myself paused to consider whether I had run crazy or no. (M 695)

Another revealing instance is when the travellers later meet the island canoe. The narrator's attitudes towards the white woman are immediately apparent:

Did I dream? - A snow-white skin; blue, firmament eyes; Golconda locks. For an instant spell-bound I stood; while with a slow, apprehensive movement, and still gazing fixedly, the captive gathered more closely about her a gauze-like robe. Taking one step within, and partially dropping the curtain of the tent, I so stood, as to have both sight and speech of Samoa, who tarried without; while the maiden, crouching in the farther corner of the retreat, was wholly screened from all eyes but mine. (M 798)

Here his surprise indicates not compassion, but desire heightened by the fact that the woman is white, by her diaphanous dress, by her apparent thralldom to 'pagan natives', and by the fact that he alone is permitted to view her, as she cringes from his dominant presence. The resolve to 'release' her, though cloaked with remorse following the killing of the islanders, accords with the narrator's wish to possess her for himself. The decision to act is his alone; his fellows are mere appendages: 'I thought fit to transport her to the *Chamois* ... I apprised Jarl of my design; and then, no more delay!' (M 802). Although this may seem behaviour exaggerated by emotion, it is consistent with the elitist attitudes that he displays throughout, and with the posturings of romantic fictions in general. Its violence conclusively demonstrates that the narrator's elitism is not humorous self-deflation, but deeply held bias. The presentation of Yillah, and the narrator's attitude towards her, exemplifies at least four of Mary Ellmann's proposed feminine stereotypes in history and literature: passivity, confinement, spirituality, and compliancy. Annette Kolodny shows how these stereotypes, transposed onto the American landscape, both motivated and characterised the drive for continental supremacy in the nineteenth-century U.S.A. In so claiming Yillah, the narrator is, then, acting in perfect accord with the driving forces of the elitist society that he represents .<sup>4</sup>

In these instances of the way that the narrator treats other characters, his representative function is displayed. Through his voice and his class-bound attitudes he establishes himself as a typical elitist. Although I have delineated him less exhaustively than his predecessors, the narrator of *Mardi* functions in the same way and with the same ends as

they do. Like theirs, his narrative is a consciously constructed artefact in which he carefully demonstrates his shaping processes, by using now obvious tag phrases such as: 'And here be it said' ... 'One cannot relate every thing at once' (M 723).<sup>6</sup> And like theirs, this narrative encodes the narrator's social prerogatives.

Once again Melville ensured that his novel participated in contemporary politics because of the class-specific rhetoric which he consciously used in it. On the analogy of *Typee* and *Omoo*, the narrator's narrative in *Mardi* is correctly a distinct presence within Melville's larger text. This chapter concentrates rather on the gap between narrative and text, and on the way that the narrative is disrupted, than on outlining the narrative's various qualities themselves. This is because in *Mardi* Melville was more concerned with the 'subversion of attitudes' (which I called goal 'b' above), than simply with demonstrating the narrator's elitist affiliation. I feel Melville was utilising what he had already established in his previous books, and was about to show his audience more clearly than ever that these were not the typical productions that they had been taken to be. However, the narrator's elitism is apparent to a reader who has become schooled in Melville's methods. These early scenes of the narrative sit so closely to *Typee* and *Omoo* as a kind of 'constant', against which new forces are deployed as the book advances. The tendency among modern commentators for these episodes to be seen as inconsequential in comparison with the later 'allegory' should be challenged.<sup>6</sup>



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The Political Chapters

The 'new' forces in the text can best be approached by considering Chapters 145-168. These are usually understood as political allegory, because they describe places and events during the island voyage which correspond to historical locations and happenings. This has led commentators such as James Duban to offer detailed explanations of the authorial attitudes latent in the satire.<sup>7</sup> Earlier analyses were adopted by both Leon Howard and Merrell Davis, whose work is still the orthodox understanding of the novel. Davis sees this 'travelogue-satire', as he calls it, as a late addition, probably included after June 1848.<sup>8</sup> In discussion of the chapters' impact, however, he, like Duban, is content to 'decode' the events that they depict. Critical attention has been dominated by the desire first to establish the chronology of *Mardi's* composition, and then to penetrate the allegory. In this section I will propose a different kind of understanding, utilising as a basis the concept of the representative narrator that was developed above and in the chapters on *Typee* and *Omoo*.

Recently, there has been a growth of interest in the European revolutions of 1848, especially in their contemporary reception in the United States; both of which are major subjects in these chapters of *Mardi*. A provocative and important book by Larry Reynolds was published last year, titled *European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance*.<sup>9</sup> This seems to be the first detailed study of the way that American authors of the period assimilated and presented European events for their readers. There has been earlier work, however, about how American

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politicians reacted, such as D.S.Spencer's *Louis Kossuth and Young America: A Study of Sectionalism and Foreign Policy 1848-1852*.<sup>10</sup>

In general, it seems to be accepted that after initial enthusiasm, American politicians, American authors, and the American public as a whole, lost interest in Europe. The bloody June Days in Paris, especially, Reynolds contends, destroyed sympathy for the revolutionaries, because they seemed to challenge so many established norms of property ownership and behaviour. Spencer shows that it was the image of Kossuth the Hungarian nationalist which Americans found attractive, and that when he actually asked them for consistent financial and political support, their interest withered away. Part of the problem here was that he alienated the strongly abolitionist section of the population by failing to denounce slavery openly. As a result, the Hungarian struggle was absorbed into the internal U.S. political debate, and in the process was lost. What seems to have attracted Americans was the idea of freedom figured in the early days of the rebellions, not the struggle to achieve it:

The entire nation followed, for example, the exploits of Lt. Mayne Reid, the novelist-turned-soldier whose service in the Mexican War had won him a reputation for gallantry - Reid quickly raised a company of men in New York, contacted Kossuth's agents, and enlisted in the rebel army, (Spencer p.23)

As with all things in ante-bellum America, the elite seems to have manipulated the presentation of the European struggle in accordance with its own prerogatives. Reynolds reveals this in his description of Emerson's articulate opposition, as does Spencer in his analysis of politicians' posturing. Daniel Webster, for instance, saw reaction to the revolutions as a way of fulminating against U.S. sectionalism: 'I wished to write a paper which should touch the national pride, and make a man feel *sheepish* and *silly* who should speak of disunion'.' Clearly, American

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perception of European events was overshadowed by developing tensions at home. By 1851 and Kossuth's visit to the United States, as Spencer shows, internal tensions about slavery and sectional ambition could no longer be disguised.

A number of recurrent themes can thus be seen in these studies: the conservatism of the American literary and political establishment; the failure of initially enthusiastic verbal support to lead to long-term commitment; and the willingness to use the evocation of the revolutions as a counter in domestic U.S. politics.

Rather than concentrating, like Davis, on the compositional sequence of *Mardi*, I should like to parallel the shock that the European revolutions gave to the world political establishment with the shock that the chapters which deal with the revolutions give to the text of the novel as a whole. The fact that they were a late addition to the text is both self-evident and incidental, when compared with the effect of their inclusion. Events demanded that they be discussed. How could an author, like Melville, who was interested in such issues as imperialism and political representation, fail to consider the European uprisings - or the similarly pressing problems in the U.S.? Melville did not delay publication of *Mardi* solely in the interests of 'fulness'; he was compelled by his political and literary interest to include these 'interpolated' chapters.

In order to survey succinctly the effect of Chapters 145-168, I have limited my analysis to four topics: the presentation of British power; the presentation of the European revolutions of 1848; the presentation of the reaction in the United States to these and other events; and the presentation of Congress and the sectional crisis. A fifth topic, the



scroll which is read in Chapter 161, is significant enough to warrant a later section to itself.

Chapters 145-149 deal with the travellers' visit to Dominora (Great Britain), and particularly with the status of King Bello in that land. The latter is described in cartoon-like terms:

He was an arsenal to behold; Upon his head the hereditary crown of Dominora, - a helmet of sea-porcupine's hide, bristling all over with spikes, in front displaying a river-horse's horn, leveled to the charge; thrust through his ears were barbed arrows; and from his dyed shark-skin girdle, depended a kilt of strung javelins. (M 1132)

This combines humour with accurate observation, demonstrating, for instance, the warlike attitude which Britain must have displayed to other nations in the middle of the nineteenth-century. Nevertheless, there is a problem with this description, when set in the context of the voice to which we have become accustomed in the early chapters of the novel and in *Typee* and *Omoo*, for this is clearly third-person narration, distanced from the consciousness of the participants. Although the meeting with Bello and his interchange with King Media is fully reported, there is much less of a sense of immediacy in comparison with a passage such as this:

It should have been mentioned ere now, that while we were busy in the forecastle, we were several times startled by strange sounds aloft. And just after, crashing into the little hair trunk, down came a great top-block, right through the scuttle, narrowly missing my Viking's crown; a much stronger article, by the way, than your goldsmiths turn out these days. This startled us much ... (M 721)

Here the narrator is a felt presence; a point that is emphasised by his frequent self-reference: 'I thought little more of the matter, though my comrade seemed to think the noises somewhat different' (M 721). In contrast, in Chapter 147, the reader is excluded from any intimation of the narrator's reactions at all. Any comments which could be attributed to the narrator's voice seem immaterial and 'open-ended': 'Ay, sorely did Bello's

goodly stature lean; but though many swore he soon must fall; nevertheless, like Pisa's Leaning Tower, he may long lean over, yet never nod' (M 1133).

This disembodied narration is reinforced by the fact that Chapter 150, one of the odder chapters in *Mardi*, is placed after the visit to Dominora. The narrator sets the scene, with a flamboyant description of the sunrise: 'And see! amid the blaze of banners, the pawings of ten thousand thousand golden hooves, days mounted Sultan, Xerxes-like, moves on' (M 1139). Yet the narrator's voice is soon relegated by the travellers', whose conversation centres around youth, age, and the trials of bodily existence:

"Thus, thus, ye gods," sighed Yoomy, "is feeling ever scouted. Yet, what might some feeling in me, I can not express."

"A good commentary on old Bardianna, Yoomy," said Babbalanja, "who somewhere says, that no Mardian can out with his heart, for his unyielding ribs are in the way. And indeed, pride, or something akin thereto, often holds check on sentiment. My lord, there are those who like not to be detected in the possession of a heart." (M 1139)

This juxtaposition of political commentary up to Chapter 149 with 'philosophical' effusion in Chapter 150 perturbs the reader, and leaves one searching for perspective, especially because the voices of Media, Babbalanja, Yoomy, and Mohi seem to be more significant presences than the narrator's.

Thus the chapters which deal with Dominora disconcert the audience because they indicate the displacement of the previously defined representative narrator, and are immediately followed by an even more peculiar display. In terms of what is actually said, for an American readership, the depiction of Bello is generous. For instance, he is seen as hospitable (M 1133), he is urged to care for his navy (M 1138), and it is remarked that: 'Rail at him as they might, at bottom, all the isles were

proud of him' (M 1129). It is comments such as these which have led people such as Reynolds to accept *Mardi* as an example of Melville's democratic conservatism. With the image of the 1812-14 naval war with Britain still fresh in the national consciousness, the mild tone assumed towards the world's dominant maritime power could have been seen as unpatriotic in the American context - although there is no review evidence that this was what happened. And yet, this is another instance of 'reading off' political attitudes from the surface of the text, and then attributing them to the author. This, as I have sought to show, is not possible with such a problematic textual structure. The narrator's voice is itself fraught, and it is surrounded by other voices which are actually much stronger. Such a presentation produces a more moderate commentary on Dominora, because it indicates the existence of a plurality of perspectives. It is on this point that I shall increasingly concentrate.

In Chapter 153 the travellers witness a volcanic eruption in Porpheero, which is the metaphor provided for the European revolutions of 1848, the second topic to be discussed in this section. They are particularly interested in the fate of Franko. Once again, however, the narrator is limited to outlining what happens, while more extensive commentary is provided by the onlookers. Thus we are told:

Hitherto the lagoon had been smooth; but anon, it grew black, and stirred; and out of the thick darkness came clamorous sounds. Soon, there shot into the air a vivid meteor, which bursting at the zenith, radiated down the firmament in fiery showers, leaving treble darkness behind.

Then, as all held their breath, from Franko there spouted an eruption, which seemed to plant all *Mardi* in the foreground. (M 1154)

Against this we see the varying reactions of Media, Mohi and the others. The king and the historian, for instance, are distraught: "My face is scorched," cried Media. "The last, last day!" cried Mohi' (M 1155). In



contrast, the philosopher Babbalanja is exultant: "You look pale, my lord," said Babbalanja, "while all other faces glow; - Yoomy, doff that halo in the presence of a king." (M 1154). Hence a range of responses is recorded, and a debate permitted among the characters:

"This fire must make a desert of the land," said Mohi; "burn up and bury all her tilth,"

"Yet, Mohi, vineyards flourish over buried villages," murmured Yoomy,

"True minstrel," said Babbalanja, "and prairies are purified by fire." (M 1155)

This, then, is another example of the narrative fracturing noticed above. It is not so much that an allegory of the 1848 revolutions has been added to *Mardi*, as that within the hastily drawn outline of those revolutions, contrasting views about their significance have been heard. The image of the eruption creates the context, but the characters' voices populate this context with interest. Given this situation, it is again improvident to attempt to suggest that Melville as author is directly responsible for any one of these stances in particular.

The third topic that I isolated was the presentation of American reaction to the European revolutions. The travellers arrive in Vivenza (the U.S.A.) in Chapter 157, and in Chapter 161, news of the eruption in Porpheero reaches the Vivenzans. Here there is little immediate discussion, with only Babbalanja expressing his rather worldly-wise opinion:

"My lord, I can not but believe, that these men are far more excited than those with whom they so ardently sympathize. But no wonder. The single discharges which are heard in Porpheero; here come condensed in one tremendous report. Every arrival is a firing off of events by platoons." (M 1180)

This may be due to the fact that this chapter also contains the reading of a scroll (for which see below), but it is also the case that the narratorial presence seems stronger here. Even though the emphasis is still on the description of events, there is more of a sense that the narrator is one of the characters involved:

Generously entertained, we tarried in this land; till at length, from over the Lagoon, came full tidings of the eruption we had witnessed in Franko, with many details. The conflagration had spread througout Porpheero; and the kings were to and fro hunted, like malefactors by blood-hounds; all that part of Mardi was heaving with throes, (M 1179)

Such involvement is what we might expect, given that the narrator embarked on the voyage not just as a full participant, but as the person who must record what happened during it, and who in its early stages fully maintained this travel-narrative convention: 'Emerging, what a scene was revealed! All round, embracing a circuit of some three leagues, stood heights inaccessible, here and there, forming buttresses, sheltering deep recesses between.' (M 879). Yet this typical posturing is very different from the range of reactions that are neutrally reported in Vivenza:

With the utmost delight, these tidings were welcomed by many; yet others heard them with boding concern.

Those, too, there were, who rejoiced that the kings were cast down; but mourned that the people themselves stood not firmer, (M 1179)

Obviously, one of the things that I am seeking to demonstrate is that the narrator of Chapters 145-168, in so much as there is a narrator, has been deprived of the ascendancy over the narrative that he enjoyed in the earlier chapters of the work. His marginal presence is here signified by the plurality of voices that cluster around him, and by the plurality of perspectives which he himself allows.

In the last topic, the presentation of Congress and sectionalism, this suggestion should be finally clear. Chapter 158 describes a session of Congress. It resorts to the cartoonism of the Bello chapters:

Entering the temple, we beheld an amphitheatrical space, in the middle of which, a great fire was burning. Around it, were many chiefs, robed in long togas, and presenting strange contrasts in their style of tattooing.

Some were sociably laughing, and chatting; others diligently making excavations between their teeth with slivers of bamboo; or turning their heads into mills, were grinding up leaves and ejecting their juices. Some were busily inserting the down of a thistle into their ears, (M 1172)

What we must recognise here is that this lampooning of Congress would have been unacceptable to the typical elitist narrator of the early chapters of *Mardi* (and of *Typee* and *Omoo*). To ridicule the central legislative body of the American Union in this way was to resort to a kind of burlesque which had previously only been applied to 'others' - to common sailors such as Rope Yarn or Jarl or Pacific islanders such as the Typees. Here, in contrast, it is the Congressmen, regardless of party, who are presented as American-Indians. While political cartoonists may have lambasted their opponents in this way, the institution of Congress itself, was, as we have seen, held to be above discussion; a perception challenged in this description in *Mardi* by associating Congress with contentious political policies such as Indian removal and slavery:

Upon the summit of the temple was a staff; and as we drew nigh, a man with a collar round his neck, and the red marks of stripes upon his back, was just in the act of hoisting a tappa standard - correspondingly striped. Other collared menials were going in and out of the temple. (M 1171)

Again, moreover, the voices of the other characters complement the portrayal. Media's terse comment "'What mob is this?' .. "'Tis the grand council of Vivenza," cried a bystander. "Hear ye not Alanno?"' (M 1174), cuts through a chapter in which Alanno's speech does much to establish the satire. Permitted by the narrator to speak in his own terms, Alanno thus completes the comedy :

The signs of the times are portentous; nay, extraordinary; I hesitate not to add, peculiar! Up! up! Let us not descend to the bathos, when we should soar to the climax! Does not all *Mardi* wink and look on? Is the great sun itself a frigid spectator? Then let us double up our mandibles to the deadly encounter. (M 1174-5)

Clearly, Alanno is based on a real person, the fanatically anti-British Senator William Allen, but as with Nulli (the secessionist and slavery-spokesman John Calhoun) in Chapter 162, it is the voice as sounded



in the narrative which largely signifies the character's function in the text of *Mardi*. With Calhoun, the argumentative interchange between the slaver and the travellers gains its power not from extraneous description, but from the fact that the dialogue encapsulates the essence of the argument so clearly:

"Oro! Art thou?" cried Babbalanja; "and doth this thing exist? It shakes my little faith." Then, turning upon Nulli, "How can ye abide to sway this curs'd dominion?"

"Peace, fanatic! Who else may till unwholesome fields, but these? And as these beings are, so shall they remain; 'tis right and righteous! Maramma champions it! - I swear it! The first blow struck for them, dissolves the union of Vivenza's vales. The northern tribes will know it and know me." (M 1190)

The remarkable feature of the narration in these chapters is that no narratorial comment is passed on statements such as this at all. The characters speak and the narrator provides some form of framework, but there seems to be no interchange between these elements, as one might typically have expected:

"Time, great Philanthropist! - Time must befriend these thralls!"

"Oro grant it!" cried Yoomy, "and let Mardi say, amen!"

"Amen! amen! amen!" cried echoes echoing echoes.

We traversed many of these southern vales; but as in Dominora, - so, throughout Vivenza, North and South, - Yillah harbored not, (M 1192)

Here the 'echoes echoing echoes' demonstrate the autonomy of the characters' voices; they seem to elude the narrator's control entirely.

To summarise, these four topics are presented indirectly, through the spoken commentary of characters within the text and via impressionistic, cartoon-like descriptions. In each, a range of views is recorded, and discussion usually ensues, both among the travellers and between them and the other characters. This variety ensures that it is rather naive to attribute any of the voices or descriptions to 'Melville' in particular. If one wishes to consider the author's relationship with this

part of the text, one must be prepared to investigate more widely. I consequently return to the notion of these chapters as disruption.

As has been remarked, the paramount impression of the narrator during Chapters 145-168 is that he is 'disembodied'. The arrogant, confident, elitist presence to which we have previously been accustomed is now a retiring, non-partisan 'attendant' figure. Although there are still markers of the way that the narrator shapes the narrative, passive constructions tend to replace previous active ones:

The three canoes still gliding on, some further particulars were narrated concerning Dominora; and incidentally, of other isles. (M 1127)

But now, a bright mustering is seen among the myriad white Tartar tents in the Orient; like lines of spears defiling upon some upland plain, the sunbeams thwart the sky. (M 1139)

Thus the impression is less of a first-person narration, and more of a third-person description. In contrast to previously, the audience is permitted to remain 'unincorporated':

Every one knows what a fascination there is in wandering up and down in a deserted old tenement in some warm, dreamy country; where the vacant halls seem echoing of silence, and the doors creak open like the footsteps of strangers. (M 761)

Such appeals to shared values, like this from earlier in the narrative are far less frequent. Moreover, different opinions, discussion, and debate are all sanctioned between the various characters, with in Chapter 152 the narrator's own voice being entirely lost between the various speeches. This discussion about British policy towards Ireland is almost drama:

"Tropes on tropes!" said Media, "Let me tell the tale, - straight-forward like a line, Verdanna is a lunatic - "

"A trope! my lord," cried Babbalanja,

"My tropes are not tropes," said Media, "but yours are. - " (M 1150)

Hence, the question must be about the effect of these chapters

within the overall schema of *Mardi*, not about what they in themselves demonstrate of Melville's political opinions. Certainly, the composition of the novel was disrupted so that Melville could include them, but in the text the resultant dislocation is to the narrator and his narrative, not to the author. It is the previously dominant narrator who is in these chapters marginalised.

I have sought to show this by considering the other voices which cluster into the narrative, and by comparing the narrative itself with some extracts from the earlier chapters, but it is also possible to discern this point by considering the jarring effect when the narrator, as Taji, is addressed. For instance, he records: 'Of Taji, Bello sought to know, whether his solar Majesty had yet made a province of the moon' (M 1133), and even more strikingly, he is later spoken to directly: "Taji! my demi-god, up heart! Old Mohi, my babe, may you live ten thousand centuries!" (M 1196). Neither of these remarks draw any response from the narrator. Of course, it could be argued that his 'response' is his narrative, but this is weak in view of the fact that when previously pressed, he has resorted to direct speech: "Attend, Taji comes, old man, because it pleases him to come. And Taji will depart when it suits him" (M 828). This dislocation is even more apparent when immediately after the end of the political section, the narrator reasserts his control over his narrative, restores his insistent first person of the earlier chapters, and addresses his audience:

Oh reader, list! I've chartless voyaged. With compass and the lead, we had not found these Mardian Isles. Those who boldly launch, cast off all cables; and turning from the common breeze, that's fair for all, with their own breath, fill their own sails, (M 169)

This, which is one of the most frequently quoted remarks from *Mardi*, is shorn of its impact unless it is juxtaposed with the marginal narrator of



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the directly preceding chapters. Here the old tone is back, and the reader is incorporated into the narrative - but it is a very odd experience after what we have just been attending to in Vivenza, Dominora and Porpheero.

Thus as a group, chapters 145-168 emphasise the disturbance which occurs during the text of *Mardi* to the narrator's voice and narrative. It is only by attending to this disturbance that Melville's political views, as expressed in *Mardi*, may be apprehended. What is ostensibly the most interesting feature of the chapters - that they present an image of identifiable contemporary events - should not entrap the twentieth-century reader. If we attend only to the moderate comments made about, for instance, Dominora, we could, like Reynolds, associate Melville with the rest of the conservative American literary establishment. However, if we recognise that the chapters demonstrate the displacement of the elitist representative narrator, we must acknowledge Melville's persistent dissentient stance. By analysing *Mardi's* discourse, in the context of a study of contemporary rhetoric and audience expectations, it is possible to reach a more adequate understanding of both Melville's loyalties and his methods. One of his primary concerns was to sensitize his readers to issues of portrayal in political and social persuasion. As I noted above, the 1848 European revolutions tended to be used by American politicians for their own ends. What is doubly significant about these chapters is, therefore, that they too 'use' the revolutions; but in order to expose this manipulation. Their function in the text is to interrupt for a period the hegemony of the elitist narrator, and so to reveal his previous narrative and social attitudes, and also show that opposition was possible. By

forcing themselves onto Melville's consciousness, the events of 1848 presented him with a very clear way of achieving this goal.

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### The Narrator's Companions

Chapters 145-168 offer the commentator a block whose distinctiveness therefore points up their method in contrast with the novel's opening. However, Melville used the same technique throughout the 'travelogue-satire'. In considering this longer section, we may also scrutinise Melville's own relationship to the text. If the elitist narrator has been displaced, should we discern the author's animating hand more clearly than in *Typee* or *Omoo*?

In Chapter 65, at the start of the travels, the narrator introduces his companions: Mohi, 'a venerable teller of stories and legends, one of the Keepers of the Chronicles of the Kings of Mardi'; Babbalanja, 'a man of mystical aspect ... much given to quotations from ancient and obsolete authorities'; Yoomy, 'a youthful, long-haired, blue-eyed minstrel'; and, of course his host, Media, King of Odo (M 858-9). It is possible to see these as 'humour' characters, the stereotyped representatives of history, philosophy, poetry and law. One could also stress the significance of these four disciplines (and so of their practitioners) in the nineteenth-century social polity. I have commented in the Introduction on the role that historians and authors had as guardians of elitist power in the U.S.A., but it could easily be argued that a figure such as Emerson was as

significant for his philosophy as for his written and spoken works.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, although the notion of kingship was alien in a republican society, that of law was not; the strong Constitution and the strong legislature were both distinctive features of the contemporary political settlement, as a figure such as Lemuel Shaw shows.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the narrator's companions are also representative figures, just as elitist as he is in their affiliations. In their discussions, they at one level rehearse typical nineteenth-century philosophical disputes. For instance, in Chapter 82 they hear how the King of Juam, who was sentenced to live all his life in a narrow valley, sought to gain knowledge of the outside world. When two of his emissaries return from the same distant island and describe it quite differently, and the king is as a result plunged into despair, Babbalanja remarks sceptically: "My lord, I have seen this same reef at Rafona. In various places, it is of various hues. As for Zuma and Varnopi, both are wrong, and both are right" (*M* 911). This is a standard response, deeply imbued with Kantian and neo-Platonic overtones.<sup>14</sup>

The visit to the 'Pontiff' Hivohitee is equally typical. This person, who symbolises organised religion, is an obvious satirical target:

In this dismal seclusion, silently the hermit confronted the minstrel; his gray hair, eyes, and beard all gleaming, as if streaked with phosphorous; while his ghastly gorget grinned hideously, with all its jaws, (*M* 1016)

Such sentiments may be motivated by American anti-Catholic nativism as much as by Transcendentalist and Unitarian opposition to established creeds and churches, but the point is bluntly made: 'Mohi lifted his hands in amazement; exclaiming at the blindness of the eyes, which had beheld the supreme Pontiff of Maramma, without knowing it'.<sup>15</sup>

In their various visits, then, the four companions articulate



historically accurate attitudes. They are thus, to an extent, representative figures like the narrator. Indeed, like him, it is their rhetoric which so establishes them. For example, King Media verbally invites his fellows to relax whilst in his company: "Are we not all now friends and companions?" he said. "So companions and friends let us be. I unbend my bow; do ye likewise" (M 870). This gesture at equality is exposed when Babbalanja annoys him, as the philosopher willingly points out:

"Have a care, sir! there is a king within hearing."

"Pardon, my lord; I was merely availing myself of the immunity bestowed upon the company. Hereafter, permit a subject to rebel against your sociable decrees, I will not be so frank any more," (M 870)

Similarly, Yoomy, the visionary poet, when not singing of love, voices instead a romanticised aristocracy, eulogising departed chieftains in a show of pervasive conservatism:

Departed the pride, and the glory of Mardi;  
The Vaunt of her isles sleeps deep in the sea,  
That rolls o'er his corse with a hush,  
His warriors bend over their spears,  
His sisters gaze upward and mourn,  
Weep, weep, for Adondo is dead!

(M 1108)

Even Babbalanja's arrogant reluctance to answer questions simply hints that he is more interested in the practice of philosophy as privileged debate than as a way through which to grapple with the actual problems of existence:

"Opaque as this paddle," said Mohi, "But, come now, thou oracle, if all things are deceptive, tell us what is truth?"

"The old interrogatory; did they not ask it when the world began? But ask it no more. As old Bardianna hath it, that question is more final than any answer," (M 944)

All of these characters, like the narrator, illustrate historically accurate nineteenth-century types. It could thus be argued that Melville

was providing some kind of entertaining 'voyage around the contemporary world', even before the 'political chapters' were added, like *Gulliver's Travels* or Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, which he had recently been reading. Occasions such as the visit to Pimminee in Chapters 128-131, with its satire of a 'reception day', would certainly support this view:

And so saying, Gaddi sauntered off; his place by Babbalanja's side being immediately supplied by the damsel Finfi. That vivacious and amiable nymph at once proceeded to point out the company, where Gaddi had left off; beginning with Gaddi himself, who, she insinuated, was a mere parvenu, a terrible infliction upon society, and not near so rich as he was imagined to be. (M 1065)

However, to assume that Melville merely wished to emulate Swift is to gloss over a number of already intimated points. First, the speeches of the four companions gradually subvert the narrator's voice. Consequently, they must always be assessed in the light of the narrator. And second, whatever representative status they may have, it is always, like the narrator's, a function of their overall purpose in the novel. Melville uses them to open up the nineteenth-century world to scrutiny - this is their purpose - not to provide incidental enjoyment. By analysing another visit, that to Maramma in Chapters 105-11, let us see whether the characters' purpose/function can be isolated.

As I have already remarked about the presentation of Hivohitee, I shall concentrate on the relationship between Pani, who is the official guide to the island, a young pilgrim, and the travellers.

Pani represents religious orthodoxy, and in charging for his services and threatening the wrath of the gods if they are refused, incurs the travellers' censure: "'You are extortionate, good Pani," said Media. 'And what wants an aged mortal like you with all these things?'" (M 983). In

thus recoiling from religious extortion, Media could seem to be expressing Melville's own opinions. Nevertheless, Melville's opinions could also be located in Babbalanja, who is more sceptical about the boy's naivety in seeking to climb the mountain alone than about the old guide's claims: "Poor youth!" murmured Babbalanja. "How earnestly he struggles in his bonds. But though rejecting a guide, still he clings to that legend of the Peak" (M 986). These are two fundamentally different viewpoints: Media criticises Pani's subservience to what he knows is vacuous, while Babbalanja is more interested in the boy's failure to reject completely the shades of superstition. Which view is Melville's if we see these characters as the author's mouthpiece?

The answer is that neither character, any more than the narrator, 'represents' the author's opinions. Indeed, for any to do so would be odd, for if the companions are in their own way all typical nineteenth-century elitists, they are then exponents of a world-view with which Melville disagreed. However, the significant absence in this confrontation in Maramba is of any involvement by the narrator, further than to set the scene. He is silent and distant, a passive recorder of the others' voices. And here it is that we may detect Melville's own involvement. For rather than allying himself, as author, with any individual character, he instead provides situations in which those characters so dominate the representative narrator that that narrator is 'talked down', and thus subverted. In other words, throughout the travelogue, not just in the 'political chapters', the narrator is marginalised through the burgeoning loquacity of his companions. Melville thus equips his text with opportunities for his narrator to be made redundant:

"My soul bursts!" cried Yoomy, "My lord, my lord, let us save the boy."  
"Speak not," said Media, "His fate is fixed. Let Mardi stand."



"Then let us away from hence, my lord; and join the pilgrims; for, in these inland vales, the lost one may be found, perhaps at the very base of Ofo."

"Not there; not there;" cried Babbalanja, "Yillah may have touched these shores; but long since she must have fled," (M 1003)

And so the conspirators, not the narrator, speak the boy's epitaph.

This point is clearer when it is realised that Melville obviously distances himself from all the characters, not just the narrator, but that only the narrator refuses the opportunity eventually offered by the text to be 'reformed'. Such distancing from a group of elitist representatives is, of course, to be expected from Melville. Not only is it established by their rhetorical self-condemnation, but also by plain satire, as is immediately apparent in Babbalanja, who we are told has studied philosophy for so long, that he is inhabited by an alter-ego, Azageddi, who sometimes dominates his speech:

"The wind strikes her dulcimers; the groves give a shout; the hurricane is only an hysterical laugh; and the lightning that blasts, blasts only in play. We must laugh or we die; to laugh is to live. Not to laugh is the tetanus." (M 1275)

This is pure nonsense. It is impossible to read such verbiage and then rationalise it in terms of 'Melville's philosophy'.

This incoherence is a necessary counterweight to Babbalanja's eventual decision to stay in Serenia. Serenia is the island at which the travellers arrive in Chapter 186. Babbalanja is immediately sceptical: "Serenia?" said Babbalanja; "methinks Serenia is that land of enthusiasts, of which we hear, my lord" (M 1284). Nevertheless, he is impressed by the honesty of the people, and their pragmatism: "Do ye then claim to live what your Master hath spoken? Are your precepts practices?" "Nothing do we claim: we but earnestly endeavor" (M 1287). As a result, and after his dream, Babbalanja accepts the offer to live in a society characterised

by its justice and integrity. In the explanation of his reasons, we realise that he has been changed by his experiences on his travels:

"My voyage is ended. Not because what we sought is found; but that I now possess all which may be had of what I sought in Mardi. Here, I tarry to grow wiser still; - then I am Alma's and the world's. (M 1300)

Mohi and Yoomy are similarly altered, for they later join him, and even Media seems to have shrugged off some of his previous absolutism, choosing to stay in his dissension-torn island, not to restore his own power, but to promote order:

"But among all noble souls, in tempest-time, the headmost man last flies the wreck. So, here in Odo will I abide, though every plank breaks up beneath me. And then, - great Oro! let the king die clinging to the keel! Farewell!" (M 1316)

These representative cardboard characters, who live only through their voices and what those voices signify to the readers, have thus through the text been permitted to change so that at its end they are no longer objects for satire. As will be seen, this is not the case with the narrator.

This development is not forced; it is another of the methods by which Melville sought to express his own dissent. Because they change, and so are relieved from their satirical burden, the narrator's companions emphasise the narrator's intransigence. Melville's views - signified by the fashion in which he exercises his authorial role - seem to have been that it is who the characters are in a text, and thus who they represent that is significant, rather than what they 'feel' or 'experience'. By permitting one set of representative characters to 'reform', Melville offers his audience his belief that it too could be reformed. Yet by eradicating the narrator in the process, this primary representative character's fate signifies the fate which Melville felt could still be in store for that

audience. This is a long way from the classic realist writing that we might have expected from a nineteenth-century author, and reaches further than the self-aware genre use in *Typee* and *Omoo*, but it is consistent with an open-eyed apprehension of literature as being an important constituent of social ideology.

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### The Narrator's Narrative

To clarify the above, it is possible to grasp the extent to which Taji is satirised and marginalised by following his narrative through the text of *Mardi*.

As has already been suggested, aboard the *Arcturion* he is a typical elitist narrator, of the kind that was originally identified in *Typee*:

These islands had been represented to me as mostly of coral formation, low and fertile, and abounding in a variety of fruits ... And thus much being said, all has been related that I then knew of the islands in question, (M 671)

This persists in his attitude towards Jarl:

Oh! Jarl, Jarl; to me in the boat's quiet stern, steering and philosophizing at one time and the same, thou and thy breaker were a study, (M 704)

It also characterises his approach while on the *Park*, for he turns Samoa and Annatoo into diverting picturesque:

Samoa's aspect, sleeping at the tiller, was almost appalling. His large opal eyes were half open; and turned toward the light of the binnacle, gleamed between lids like bars of flame. And added to all, was his giant stature and savage lineaments, (M 770)

Yillah, too, is subjected to his narratorial voice, for in a self-aware fashion, he takes upon himself the relation of her story, characterising her as too immature (because female) to accomplish it alone:<sup>6</sup>



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Though clothed in language of my own, the maiden's story is in substance the same as she related. Yet were not these things narrated as past events; she merely recounted them as impressions of her childhood. (M 801)

Such a strategy persists on Odo, where the narrator tries to set up home.

But as we have seen, once Yillah is kidnapped and the travelogue begun, the narrator seems to lose control of his own story. While he maintains the posture of the typical travel author, the subjects of his descriptions become increasingly bizarre:

In good time, we landed at Diranda. And that landing was like landing at Greenwich among the Waterloo pensioners. The people were docked right and left; some without arms; some without legs; not one with a tail; but to a man all had heads, though rather the worse for wear. (M 1100)

Eventually, he becomes little more than an amanuensis for his companions. Chapter 175, for instance, is composed entirely from direct speech, while Chapter 180 is mainly drama. Thus there is a consistent displacement of the narrator through the text of *Mardi*.

However, while it is consistent, this displacement is not smooth. Much of the censure Melville implies derives from the way that the narrative testifies to the narrator's struggle for dominance as he is pressurised. What we read as his narrative is the increasingly bizarre record of his marginalisation. This is especially apparent in the intermittent chapters in the travelogue when he seeks to reassert his control. For example, Chapter 97 trumpets his exertion: 'A thing incredible is about to be related' (M 957), yet he soon lapses into incoherence:

Do you believe that you lived three thousand years ago? That you were at the taking of Tyre, were overwhelmed in Gomorrah? No. But for me, I was at the subsiding of the Deluge, and helped swab the ground, and build the first house. With the Israelites, I fainted in the wilderness. (M 958)

In Chapter 119 he similarly collapses:

Ay: many, many souls are in me. In my tropical calms, when my ship lies tranced on Eternity's main, speaking one at a time, then all with one voice: an orchestra of many French bugles and horns, rising, and falling, and

swaying, in golden calls and responses. (M 1022)

In these comments, the narrator's singular voice is unseated by the clamour of many tongues from throughout history. While these sentiments have sometimes been taken as 'great statements', the most noble part of *Mardi*, in the context of the narrator's normative expression, they can only be aberrations, as he himself seems to acknowledge:

My cheek blanches white while I write; I start at the scratch of my pen; my own mad brood of eagles devours me; fain would I unsay this audacity; but an iron-mailed hand clenches mine in a vice, and prints down every letter in my spite. (M 1023)

This comment records the fracturing of Taji's personality as he writes, yet also his compulsion to write in order to maintain his identity at all. It should sensitize us to the gap between his former discourse and what he is now required to produce.<sup>17</sup>

Consequently, by Chapter 169, another of these curious chapters, the narrator can be seen to have lost his reason. Although he will still tell of both Serenia and Hautia's island, he is not the capable, authoritative figure that we first met. 'Hard have I driven to keep stout heart' (M 1213), he says, but he has been forced at last to quit the real world and flee to the: 'world of mind; wherein the wanderer may gaze round, with more of wonder than Balboa's band roving through the golden Aztec glades' (M 1214). It is this situation which motivates his continued journey once Babbalanja is settled in Serenia: 'But I was fixed as fate' (M 1301). His resultant destiny is unavoidable:

"Nay, Taji; commit not the last, last crime!" cried Yoomy.  
 "He's seized the helm! eternity is in his eye! Yoomy: for our lives we must now swim," ...  
 ... "Now I am my own soul's emperor; and my first act is abdication! Hail! realm of shades!" (M 1316)

Yoomy's and Mohi's comments here establish the distance between the

narrator and the rest of the (unmaddened) characters. It is their dominance which has forced his suicide.

Note that in these chapters, the narrator's personal presence is emphasised, in contrast to the rest of the travelogue. It seems that ironically whenever he stresses his authority, and seeks to reassert himself over his narrative, the narrative that he produces only records his burgeoning instability. Paradoxically, his self-insistence contributes to his being further satirized. It is implied that not only should the other characters reject him, but that the audience should too:

As somnambulists fast-frozen in some horrid dream, ghost-like glide abroad,  
and fright the wakeful world; so that night, with death-glazed eyes, to and  
fro I flitted on the damp and weedy beech. (M 1315)

What is there any longer in such a figure to command loyalty?

This, I feel, is the question that Melville was seeking to pose. A reading of *Mardi* should be a disconcerting experience, especially given the kind of textual framework that I have been suggesting Melville employed. Even at the simplest of levels, there is much to be disturbed by. I have given examples of the narrator's increasingly alarming rhetoric, but there are many more:

Dreams! Dreams! golden dreams; endless, and golden, as the flowery prairies  
... my dreams herd like buffaloes, browsing on to the horizon, and browsing on  
round the world; and among them, I dash with my lance, to spear one, ere they  
all flee. (M 1021)

Of course, such extravagance is not confined to him; although I have spoken of the way his companions 'talk him down', their conversation is not always that of realistic commentators. The image that they provide of a rational discussion is frequently distorted, and when it issues in Babbalanja's ravings or Yoomy's poetry, it is clearly also to be repudiated:

Care is all stuff;-  
Puff! Puff!  
To puff is enough;-



Puff! Puff!

(M 1032)

Here any pretence at meaning has been evaporated into mere sounds; language as a means of communication has broken down. Thus this is not just bad poetry, but bad poetry with a purpose. The intention is to defamiliarize the reading process, and encourage the audience carefully to consider what it is being provided with for its edification. The quest itself has the same object. It is supposedly the quest for Yillah which motivates the travelogue, but this is specious. The quest is referred to in only the scantest of ways during the voyage, and then solely by the companions, never by the narrator himself. Yillah is merely a cipher that is accorded little significance until the very last chapters.

To open oneself to the narrator's narrative through its many shifts and displacements is thus to allow oneself to become a worried reader. The figure with whom the nineteenth-century elitist audience was meant to identify initially satisfies its trust, yet for various reasons, then betrays (or is forced to betray) it. The first failure is one that I have so far hardly mentioned; he accepts the challenge to impersonate a demi-god:

Emboldened, I returned to the charge, and labored hard to impress them with just such impressions of me and mine, as I deemed desirable. The gentle Yillah was a seraph from the sun; Samoa I had picked off a reef in my route from that orb; and as for the Skyeman, why, as his name imported, he came from above. In a word, we were all strolling divinities. (M 828)

To say the least, this is a bizarre move for a figure such as he, who represents the Christian West.

Having so discussed the narrator at length, let me raise again the question of what the contemporary audience would have felt about reading such material. If the narrator is their representative, would they not

have registered dismay at his slide into incoherence? Would they, moreover, have attributed the reasons for this to his persistent elitism in the face of his companions' reformation? Surely he was not being forced to struggle to make his voice heard among them for nothing.

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### The Scroll

In much of the above, I have been hoping to illustrate what kind of an experience it is to read *Mardi*. This approach has been underpinned by the belief that there was a close bond in the nineteenth-century between the elitist audience and 'its' narrator. Because this figure expresses shared attitudes, he is the audience's representative in the text, and a reading of the text would normally have served to confirm those attitudes. The crucial thing about a Melville text such as *Mardi* is, that it does precisely the opposite and subverts them.

This view entails that there is a qualitative difference between the narrator and the other characters. Owing to the bond with the audience occasioned by the production of his narrative, the narrator carries greater ideological weight than they do. Because we read his narrative, we are implicated in a relationship with him of creating and assessing values. The other characters are, more properly, foils through which he is exposed. In this exposure, his progressive instability and marginalisation are revealed, and so the audience is encouraged to ask questions, and to examine its attitudes. Hence, the strategy of the text is to create a space which the audience has to fill. Melville's role as author is to animate this process.

None of the characters are his mouthpiece, but together they create the context for his views to become apparent. They become apparent both through the satire of the representative narrator, and most clearly, in the scroll.

It is in Chapter 161 that the travellers, whilst in Vivenza, witness the reading of a scroll. Its text is recorded in full in the novel, and it is basically an essay on history and government. Its obvious central assertions are that the historical process is global rather than national, that all nations in periods of strength think they are the culmination of that process, and that Vivenza (the U.S.A.) should therefore beware assuming that it is that false culmination:

"And as in the mound-building period of yore, so every age thinks its erections will forever endure. But as your forests grow apace, sovereign-kings! overrunning the tumuli in your western vales; so, while deriving their substance from the past, succeeding generations overgrow it; but in time, themselves decay." (M 1181)

This is something for the audience to ponder. U.S. expansionism, christened and justified by the title 'Manifest Destiny', was a popular concept during the 1840s and 50s, and still maintained its adherents to the end of the century. 'We need Hawaii just as much and a good deal more than we did California. It is Manifest Destiny', said President McKinley in 1898, thereby expressing precisely the aspirations which the scroll sought to oppose fifty years before.<sup>10</sup> In such light, the scroll calls for a reassessment of aspirations, and also offers a clear warning;

"And though crimson republics may rise in constellations, like fiery Aldebarans, speeding at their culminations; yet, down must they sink at last, and leave the old sultan-sun in the sky." (M 1184)

If it does voice Melville's own opinions, then these seem to be quite distant from those of other New York literati.



Yet the scroll is more challenging still than this. It should be noticed that there is considerable debate as to who the author is:

"My lord, I am amazed at the indiscretion of a demi-god," said Babbalanja ...  
"I recognized your sultanic style the very first sentence ...  
... "Philosopher! I am astounded at your effrontery. I detected your philosophy the very first maxim." (M 1187)

This dispute is never resolved; the authorship of the anonymous scroll which had been found pinned to a tree is kept secret. Nevertheless, the speculation, in which even the narrator indulges, foregrounds the issue of its provenance:

Now, could it have been Babbaanja? Hardly. For, philosophic as the document was, it seemed too dogmatic and conservative for him. King Media? But though imperially absolute in his political sentiments, Media delivered not himself so boldly, when actually beholding the eruption in Franko. (M 1187)

This point is perhaps further evidence that the 'author' is Melville himself, who in an inverted parody of the Round Robin in *Omoo* offers his own commentary on U.S. ambitions. Nevertheless, the mystified origin of the scroll emphasises that what the scroll is is just as important as what it says. Like the various characters, the scroll has a function in the text. Although it may be different from them in that it seems to express views which could be attributable to Melville, it shares the strategic burden that they also carry. This burden is the raising of the issue of 'representation' itself.

To an extent, this is accomplished by the scroll's wording:

"Thus, freedom is more social than political. And its real felicity is not to be shared. *That* is of a man's own individual getting and holding. It is not, who rules the state, but who rules me. Better to be secure under one king, than exposed to violence from twenty millions of monarchs, though oneself be of the number." (M 1185)

What this says is that political institutions can deceive; a republican system does not of itself guarantee liberty. In a sense, this is a 'defensive', ironic definition, that urges people to beware equating

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expressions of freedom with the enjoyment of freedom. It urges that we should begin to establish liberty where we are, and not assume that we are free because we inhabit a state which enjoys 'free' institutions.

It is precisely such an assumption that the people of Vivenza make, as is shown when they immediately destroy the scroll:

"Old tory, and monarchist!" they shouted, "Preaching over his benighted sermons in these enlightened times! Fool! does he not know that all the Past and its graves are being dug over?" (M 1187)

And in claiming this, they demonstrate that they believe that their nation has achieved the perfect polity, and that they therefore no longer need to question their rulers. But in a Vivenza governed by the kind of 'Council' that we considered above, and dogged by slavery, this would seem to be a specious belief.

To unpack the scroll's significance. Its wish to promote a moderate response to Vivenzan republican claims seems to have been provoked by an over-enthusiastic welcome to the news of revolution in Porpheero: "Hurrah! another kingdom is burnt down to the earth's edge; another demi-god is unhelmed" (M 1179). What the author apparently fears is that in assuming that republicanism is inherently good, and that Vivenza is the summation of republican government, then Vivenzans assume they are also free people. The scroll says that this is not necessarily the case: "Delegate your power, you leagued mortals must. The hazard you must stand" (M 1184).

When set in the context of the production of *Mardi*, the scroll seems to expose the shallowness of the contemporary American response to the European revolutions of 1848. It emphasises the noisy support which was given to the revolutionaries, but then comments that that support was lent during a time when the U.S.A. was itself spiralling to war. Although there

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was not armed hostility between South and North for ten years after *Mardi's* publication, as a study such as D.M.Potter's shows, by the late 1840s all the seeds of the future conflict had been sown.<sup>19</sup> In attempting to lead its auditors to question the Vivenzan political situation, the scroll by analogy leads its American audience to scrutinise the U.S. situation. If it expresses Melville's own views, then the scroll signifies both his desire to warn his compatriots before it is too late, and his scepticism that such a warning will not be heeded.

Thus, while some may say that it is speculative to attribute any such sentiments to the author of *Mardi*, I would say that the scroll so operates as to make such speculation entirely possible. Paradoxically, because Melville is so distant from his text, with a voice that can only be heard through the confused jumble of his characters' voices, he actually offers us the freedom to speculate. In this light, the scroll is a microcosm of the larger text of the novel, for one function of both was to provoke debate. Through its emphasised anonymity the inquisitive reader is led to engage with the question of political representation. Because the scroll is itself foisted upon its audience, the reader should consider other political documents which have been foisted upon their audiences - such as the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence. Do these correctly express the will of the populace as a whole? Or do they more truly enshrine the prerogatives of limited groups? In the Introduction to this thesis I argued that it was the manipulation of the 'idea of America' which kept the elite in power in the nineteenth-century U.S. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were central features of this 'American idea', and were, as we have seen, represented as inalienable. Literature, too, contributed to this representation. My feeling is that



*Mardi*, by foregrounding 'representation' itself, is trying to expose such a process. This is what the scroll seeks to accomplish, and in using it in this way, Melville was being true to the opportunity offered to him by the U.S. reception of the 1848 revolutions. As I said above, this was characterised by elitist self-interest; a self-interest which Melville in *Mardi* was trying to expose.

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### Contemporary Reception

In drawing this consideration of *Mardi* together, it is instructive to enquire whether any of the remarks made above are testified to by critics' reactions after the book's publication.

The New York *Literary American* commented on April 28 1849 that it: 'could find little difference between the supposed true narratives and the professed romance ... all [were] marked by the same off-hand facile style, the same engrossing marvellous incident, and the same knowledge of the sea'.<sup>20</sup> Such a view shows how *Typee* and *Omoo* did certainly act to determine the context in which the later novel was read, as does Bayard Taylor's aside that:

"Mardi" is altogether the most striking work which Mr. Melville has produced, exhibiting a range of learning, a fluency of fancy, and an originality of thought and diction, of which "Typee" with all its distinctness and luxuriance of description gave little evidence, (*Graham's Magazine* June 1849)

This is high praise from the doyen of travel writers, and demonstrates how difficult it was for Melville (or any contemporary author) to break out from the mould in which they had first been set by the literary

establishment. It seems that pleasure at the first part of the novel, for some reviewers, counteracted bemusement at its later pages.

Nevertheless, there was such bemusement, with a strong sense that the anticipated pleasure of reading the book had been frustrated:

We were flattered with the promise of an account of travel, amusing, though fictitious; and we have been compelled to pore over an undigested mass of rambling metaphysics. We had hoped for a pleasant boat-ride among the sunny isles of the tropics; instead of which, we were taken bodily, and immersed into the fathomless sea of Allegory ... (*Saroni's Musical Times* 29 September 1849)

This is significant, because it shows that the novel's progressive 'displacement' had worked, and that the reader was left struggling for perspective. Another review illustrates the same point:

[*Mardi*] aims at many things and achieves none satisfactorily; but its main intention is to be a mild satire on the whole world and its ways, and a preaching of certain transcendental nonsense which is meant for *bona fide* transcendental philosophy. There is little or no story; and after the first volume ... the labor of reading is perfectly Herculean, and remarkably unprofitable ... (*Sharp's London Journal* 15 May 1849)

Again, the opening of the book is praised because it is intelligible, but the rest is seen as exasperating, and therefore meaningless.

These comments demonstrate, however, that while the reviewers may have been disconcerted, they still sought to assimilate *Mardi* to recognisable genres, and that after the first section, they felt it was best to call it an 'allegory' or 'satire'. This meant that although reviewers could appreciate that the text was motivated by a deep-seated concern about contemporary events, they could simply brand *Mardi* with the label of Swift or Rabelais. The *London Morning Chronicle* commented, for instance, that it was: "' a wonderful and unreadable Compound" of Ossian and Rabelais, of *Utopia* and *Oceana*, of *Gulliver* and *Cook's Voyages*' (19 May 1849, quoted Hetherington p.109). While the *Albion* said: 'other parts require a wide-awake application, or, as in *Gulliver's Travels*, one half the

aroma will be lost' (21 April 1849). The most that could seem to be hoped for was an awareness that: 'all the difficult subjects of modern discussion were taken up by "the feathered savages ... of the Pacific"' (*Illustrated London News* 26 May 1849, quoted Hetherington p.110). The institutional machine was doing its best to smooth over the book's irregularities.

But some critics significantly acknowledged the problem that they had in perfecting their assimilation. The writer in the *Chronicle* had: 'some difficulty in describing the extraordinary imaginary olla podrida of which the last two volumes ... are made up'. Towards the end of the book:

The author throws off all control ... and riots ... in a chaos of incoherent poetry and vague satire - a mental cloudland, full of bright flashes and dark vapours; but the hues and lines of the picture, the poetry and the satire ... so worked and whipped and mashed up together, that the coolest and clearest-sighted reader will hardly be able to tell after fifty pages or so whether the book before him be composed of sublime poetry or bedlamite ravings. (*Morning Chronicle* 19 May 1849)

The *Illustrated News* said that the book was 'most extraordinary'.

Such remarks indicate most strongly that *Mardi* was achieving what seems to me to have been its author's desired goal. In a sense, the aim was not to allow the critics to assimilate and synthesise, but to force them to react, and think - and in this *Mardi* was successful:

There are passages in this part of the work, which, taken as separate pictures, display unrivaled beauty and power ... the same easy command of forcible, picturesque language, which in his former productions called forth such a gush of admiration, even from the most hide-bound reviewer.

But the scene changes after we arrive at 'Mardi' and the main plot of the book (such as it is) begins to open.

We are then presented with a tissue of conceits, fancifully strung about the personages of the tale, expressed in language that is equally intolerable for its affectation and its obscurity. The story has no movement, no proportions, no ultimate end; and unless it is a huge allegory - bits of which peep out here and there - winding its unwieldy length along, like some monster of the deep, no significance or point. We become weary with the shapeless rhapsody, and wonder at the audacity of the writer which could attempt such an experiment with the long suffering of his readers. (G. Ripley, New York *Tribune* 10 May 1849)

The most significant phrases here are 'unless it is a huge allegory' - for



Ripley is clearly uncertain that it was - and 'an experiment with the long suffering of his readers'. The impression that I get from this review is that Ripley understood that *Mardi* was trying to redefine his critical perception, and that he was resisting such a redefinition. The most persistent note in the piece is the call: 'Let the author return to the transparent narration of his own adventures, in the pure, imaginative prose, which he handles with such graceful facility, and he will be everywhere welcomed as one of the most delightful of American writers'. The luminous light of Melville's first books is thus invoked as the necessary corrective to his current excess.

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### Modern Criticism

If we set this testimony from contemporary reviewers alongside what evidence there is of Melville's reactions to them, it is possible to see how their comments may have affected him. On 5 June 1849 he wrote to his new London publisher Richard Bentley:

The critics on your side of the water seem to have fired quite a broadside into "Mardi"; but it was not altogether unexpected ... Besides, the peculiar thoughts and fancies of a Yankee upon politics & other matters could hardly be presumed to delight that class of gentlemen who conduct your leading journals; while the metaphysical ingredients (for want of a better term) of the book, must of course repel some of those who read simply for amusement. - However, it will reach those for whom it is intended ... *Letters* No.61, p.85

Having allowed for the fact that he is writing to his publisher, and thus will speak with care, this letter is an interesting footnote on Melville's activities in *Mardi*. It is significant that he both acknowledges a purpose for the novel which will not be immediately apparent, and seems to write

with the frank acceptance that it was not intended to please either those who 'read simply for amusement' or 'that class of gentlemen' - the English equivalent of the U.S. literary establishment.<sup>21</sup>

Just as important, moreover, is his subsequent remark that:

You may think, in your own mind that a man is unwise, - indiscreet, to write a work of that kind, when he might have written one perhaps, calculated merely to please the general reader, & not provoke attack, however masqued [sic.] in an affectation of indifference or contempt. But some of us scribblers, My Dear Sir, always have a certain something unmanageable in us, that bids us do this or that, and be done it must - hit or miss.

This also suggests that Melville wrote with the full awareness that he was courting controversy. It is not a statement of great 'artistic intent' so much as an acceptance of the problem of communicating his unpopular points. It demonstrates his sense of purpose just as strongly as this next comment:

I have now in preparation a thing of a widely different cast from "Mardi": - a plain, straightforward, amusing narrative of personal experience - the son of a gentleman on his first voyage to sea as a sailor - no metaphysics, no conic-sections, nothing but cakes & ale.

This book, which he proceeds in the letter to compare with *Typee*, he thus says will return to the style of his first productions. But while this seems to acknowledge a concession to the reviewer's suggestions, his words actually give no indication as to the prospective book's intent. As will be seen, although it is markedly different from *Mardi* in tone, *Redburn*, just like *Typee* and *Omoo*, registered Melville's political and social dissent.

Modern criticism of the novel, however, tends to follow the example of the nineteenth-century, in refusing to accept such an oppositional purpose. As I hinted at the beginning of the chapter, some of the most fruitful recent work on *Mardi* is that which explores Melville's use of

genre. James Jubak's article (see above) is of direct significance here, but Janet Giltrow's 'Speaking Out: Travel and Structure in Herman Melville's Early Narratives' is also interesting.<sup>22</sup> This is because, while considering *Typee*, *Omoo*, *Redburn*, and *White-Jacket*, Giltrow omits to analyse the first section of *Mardi* (I take 'travel' not to denote the travelogue/satire, but the conventional chapters). Presumably this is because the latter half of the book challenges the travel narrative narrator. This omission indicates that critics still wish to homogenise the text. Ironically, this is a fault even of Jubak, who in focussing on that first section, establishes the possibility for an even more interesting discussion, but then merely comments: 'The concentration of the travel book on the individual observer, for example, leads to the possibility of questioning that observer and the validity of his individual truth' (Jubak, p.133). This, precisely, is what I have suggested Melville does.

The tendency of a writer such as Davis to broach the possibility of determining the allegory is, as we have seen, equally limited. Importantly, he recognizes the difficulty: 'Since the Narrator's quest through *Mardi* is a literary device to bind together the book's varied and disparate ingredients and at the same time to give coherence of meaning to the narrative, the attempt to find a perfectly consistent allegory in the book is fruitless' (Davis, p.199). Yet this emphasis on the 'binding together' indicates another desire to find in the text some obvious consistency, and encourages the view that: 'Although as art *Mardi* leaves much to be desired the experience which it exemplifies marks a significant growth in an author who came to acknowledge an ambition to write "such things as the Great Publisher of Mankind ordained ages before he published 'The World'"' (Davis, p.200). By categorising *Mardi* as Art, Davis accounts for its



'infelicities' and attributes them to 'Melville's development'. The other limitation with an approach that focusses extensively on the contradictions of allegory is demonstrated by James Duban. This is that it is possible to disagree with his attribution of exact detail.<sup>23</sup> Again, this is a shame, because comments such as the below alert the reader to Melville's textual politics in the novel:

However admirable [Taji's] wish to rescue Yillah from certain harm, his subsequent effort to enslave her both psychologically and physically corresponds to the way territorial lust and the cultivation of slavery in lands freed from the allegedly tyrannical Mexicans rendered hypocritical America's nominally libertarian rhetoric concerning westward expansion. (Duban, p.20)

This moves towards the perception of the narrator as a construct figure who, by virtue of being a function of the text, illuminates contemporary attitudes; the view that I have tried to explore.

Hence, I have argued that the experience of reading *Mardi*, because one is confronted by its inconsistencies and alarming interruptions, should direct one's attention to how the text was produced, and so to the historical context that determined its production. It might have been thought that a post-structuralist commentator would follow the same path. However, a leading exponent of the school, in considering *Mardi*, reads the novel as follows:

What begins on the monotonous ocean ends on 'an endless sea'. Nothing has been resolved. The whole book merely reflects the pendulum stasis of 'Time's endless tunnel'. The opening lull proves everlasting. No soul is found to be 'a magnet', 'none with whom to mingle sympathies'. All is as repetitious as the overlapping fictions of Bill Marvel's stories or Ned Ballad's songs.<sup>24</sup>

While this ostensibly probes the contrasting sections, Harold Beaver seems more to have been gulled by the narrator's various exhibitions of maddened rhetoric than to have traced the possible motivations for the text's discontinuity. Consequently, he also smooths out his reading, reducing the

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book to 'a sum of inconsistencies' (his essay's sub-title), and so failing to admit, for instance, the significance of the narrator's originally conventional language.

Yet it is from this point that I feel *Mardi* should be read. Once the narrator has been accorded his typical status and the bond with the audience established, then the reasons for the various interruptions can be understood. These are all parts of a progressive destabilising of the narrative voice, and hence of the assumed relationship between the audience and its representative presence. In establishing the conditions for this destabilising, I have proposed that we can discern Melville's own allegiances. Although these are never bluntly demonstrated, this is entirely in keeping with the method which he had expounded in his earlier works. It is only more difficult to say with any certainty that *Mardi* expresses the author's sense of political dissent because the source material which was available for consideration when studying *Typee* and *Omoo* is absent here. This removes the 'concrete' evidence that was previously so useful and implies that an argument, such as this, which is based on a contention about the author's self-aware exploitation of literary conventions and the conventional audience, can seem to be much more 'self-enclosed'.

Nevertheless, despite this fact, *Mardi* does its best not just to encourage 'reflection', but to deliver some kind of verdict on Melville's contemporary society. The author was clearly writing with a sense of compulsion. He had to respond to the events of 1848 in some way; he had to denounce Taji and Taji's society as bluntly as possible. This he did by subverting the representative narrator and eliminating him as the dominant

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presence in the text. In the narrator's marginalisation, we have Melville's parable for what he hoped would be the fate of Western elitist society; that the currently dominant classes would be pushed aside, and that the previously repressed voices of the workers and colonised peoples be allowed to be heard. Melville's own doggedness in his letters attests to his sense of satisfaction that *Mardi* demonstrates this dissent. In this light, immediate comprehension of the author's intentions is perhaps less necessary than that his points should be made. His subsequent development, as he turned directly to Western society in his next novels and stories, was all founded upon the analysis he proposed in his first three books. The analysis urged by the scroll cuts at the very basis of the American state, preparing the ground for this discussion. So although in *Redburn*, in *White-Jacket*, and even in *Moby-Dick*, Melville resumes the use of sources which he had abandoned in *Mardi*, this technically more innovative novel is just as critical as they are.



## *REDBURN*

'the lights and shades, the mirth and  
melancholy, the humor and tears of  
real life.'

*Literary World* 17 November 1849

Melville's fifth and sixth novels were written with haste. Both appeared less than a year after *Mardi*, *Redburn* in September and November 1849, and *White-Jacket* in January and March 1850. *Mardi*'s failure to sensitize the audience to issues of politics and political representation probably hastened their arrival, and some commentators have pointed out that Melville apparently disparaged them, calling them: 'two jobs, which I have done for money'. Yet, he also said: 'in writing these two books, I have not repressed myself much - so far as they are concerned; but have spoken pretty much as I feel' (*Letters* No 65 pp.91-92). Whether the 'they' to whom he refers are the novels or the reviewers, this comment indicates that the books continue his duel with nineteenth-century elite society.

### *Redburn*

In *Redburn*, Melville turns his back to Pacific imperialism, and concentrates instead fully on an analysis of the trans-Atlantic world of trade and industry, with which he was to become increasingly preoccupied. Exposed to the realities of commerce at an early age through his family's businesses, Melville's insight was deepened by his voyages and his work in a whaling ship, and reinforced by the long years that he later spent as a minor customs official. This has meant that as with all his early novels, a biographical interpretation has usually been placed on *Redburn*. Since the publication of W.H.Gilman's *Melville's Early Life and Redburn*, it has no longer been assumed that the novel is a simple fictionalisation of Melville's own experiences. Nevertheless, the fact that Melville himself sailed to Liverpool in 1839 has meant that this long legacy of interpretation is still very influential. When I speak of the significance

of his experiences, therefore, I mean to stress that they exposed him to the underside of capitalist life. Initially, on the Liverpool voyage, he saw both the deprivation of the Liverpool poor, and the conditions inflicted on sailors and emigrants alike. Later, while working in the New York docks, he was subjected to having to work in a system that he abominated; this topped off his repudiation of the mid-century elite.'

*Redburn* is set at a nodal point in the development of international commerce; it records the impact alike of sailing vessels and the steamers which were soon to supplant them. Both bound the Old and New, and especially the British and American worlds, together in a vast inter-linked trading structure. A huge stream of people, products and capital flowed across the Atlantic and generated stupendous wealth (for some). Taking American goods from the new factories of Massachusetts to Europe, the ships returned with more goods, and also people. Emigration to the U.S.A. which had before 1845 only once exceeded 100,000 a year, suddenly surged, soon averaging 350,000; it hit 428,000 in 1854, when Liverpool, the premier British port, despatched 150,000 emigrants, primarily to New York.

Through these ports, then, passed the human investments and industrial manufactures of a new age; yet they were only the sea-board termini of a hugely complex, rapidly evolving system. In both Britain and the U.S., they were linked with the interior by railways and waterways. Although in the U.K. these waterways were modest undertakings, in America the great river systems of the Hudson and Mississippi/Missouri were tied to huge new canals, such as the Erie, Chesapeake and Ohio. Railway investment was massive in both nations; the first American company was founded in 1830 - by 1860 there were 31,256 miles of track.

All of this transformed life, and promoted economic cohesiveness; the



global market really was possible now that people could travel the length of England in a day and across the Atlantic to New York in thirteen. With the advent of the electric telegraph by Morse in 1844, the stamp by Rowland Hill in 1841, and continual improvements in printing technology, the rapid dissemination of information and ideas abrogated previous distances and consolidated the elite's power.<sup>2</sup>

Yet for the unfavoured, the world had also become grimmer, and more claustrophobic. Despite the excitement which a list such as the above can generate it was all achieved at immense human cost. The trebling of the British population between 1750 and 1850, and the sixfold increase of the U.S. between 1790 and 1850 (from four to twenty-three millions), placed unprecedented demands on housing. Inevitably, cities expanded, and the standards of living of all but the privileged fell sharply. When people were turned into unit-labour-costs, the result was social and moral deprivation. As commentators stress, life itself was 'industrialised'. Again, emigration is a good example of the tendency, for as P. Taylor suggests, this could be characterised as a 'commercial system', simply another aspect of trade.<sup>3</sup> In ports such as Liverpool, illiterate would-be emigrants were met from the new railways by runners who 'found' them suitable ships, literally dragging them to the cheapest available vessel. These men worked for brokers who demanded 12½% commission; once aboard, the people were no more than cargo. Legislation to regulate this situation appeared only slowly - the returns were too good for the ship-owners who were such an important element in the trans-Atlantic economy:

At the worst, as the *Thomas Gelston* which reached Quebec in 1834, the crossing lasted nine weeks, and passengers were horribly crowded and short of food, but fortunately, 'a succession of fine weather enabled them to keep the hatches open - in a storm they would have smothered.' Twelve years later, the *Elizabeth and Sarah*, also from an Irish port, was eighty-three years old, overcrowded, ill-supplied with water, with temporary berths so badly

constructed that some collapsed, and with 'excrement and filth -- thrown into the ballas, producing a stench which made it difficult [for officials at Quebec] to remain any length of time below. (Taylor p.109)

So *Redburn* focusses on life in the industrialising nineteenth-century. It tells of a journey by river from up-state New York, via that city to Liverpool, and hence of a rail journey from Liverpool to London, returning to the U.S. in a ship freighted with emigrants. But what is the image of these events that it portrays? With our knowledge of Melville's previous compositional method, this is what I shall explore.<sup>4</sup>

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1) The situation as *Redburn* describes it

The narrator of *Redburn*, as of all Melville's early novels, is a fictional persona whose presentation of events and characters we are invited to question. Wellingborough Redburn, the young sailor who makes the journey to Liverpool, has values and attitudes distinct from Melville the author.

The world according to *Redburn* is clearly dominated by trade. He demonstrates the magnitude of nineteenth-century commerce in his descriptions of Liverpool, using the city as a symbol of the universal effect of the industrial revolution:

Surrounded by its broad belt of masonry, each Liverpool dock is a walled town, full of life and commotion; or rather, it is a small archipelago, an epitome of the world, where all the nations of Christendom, and even those of Heathendom, are represented. For, in itself, each ship is an island, a floating colony of the tribe to which it belongs. (p.181)

Redburn grasps that no part of the globe can any longer resist the capitalist dynamo (this was, of course, the lesson of *Typee* and *Omoo*), and his warm tone seems to approve this fact:

Here are brought together the remotest limits of the earth; and in the collective spars and timbers of these ships, all the forests of the globe are represented, as in a grand parliament of masts. Canada and New Zealand send their pines; America her live oak; India her teak; Norway her spruce; and the Right Honorable Mahogany, member for Honduras and Campeachey, is seen at his post by the wheel. Here, under the beneficent sway of the Genius of Commerce, all climes and countries embrace; and yard-arm touches yard-arm in brotherly love. (R 181)

In his language, he draws all nations and cultures, however old, into a vast economic system:

[in] Liverpool, I beheld long China walls of masonry; vast piers of stone; and a succession of granite-rimmed docks, completely inclosed, and many of them communicating, which almost recalled to mind the great American chain of lakes; Ontario, Erie, St. Clair, Huron, Michigan, and Superior. The extent and solidity of these structures, seemed equal to what I had read of the old Pyramids of Egypt. (R 176)

He revels in what he sees as unrivalled opportunities for international 'exchange':

Indeed, it is a God-send to fall in with a fellow like this. He knows things you never dreamed of; his experiences are like a man from the moon - wholly strange, a new revelation. (R 189)

And he extolls the energy and excitement of the scene:

A paved area, very wide, is included within the wall; and along the edge of the quays are ranges of iron sheds, intended as a temporary shelter for the goods unloaded from the shipping. Nothing can exceed the bustle and activity displayed along these quays during the day; bales, crates, boxes, and cases are coming and going. (R 180)

This all exhibits considerable perception for a supposedly naive youth, recognising most of the points that I outlined above.<sup>2</sup> His understanding that the nations of the world are now becoming incorporated into a global market is most important, for while he sometimes laments the loss of individuality this causes, he never criticises the resultant homogenised capitalist system itself:



Liverpool, away from the docks, was very much such a place as New York. There were the same sort of streets very much; the same rows of houses with stone steps; the same kind of sidewalks and curbs; and the same elbowing, heartless-looking crowd as ever. (R 222)

On the contrary, his language - that most significant register - positively celebrates the commercial achievements displayed in Liverpool. Indeed, his great lists of products and his comparison of the docks with natural phenomena such as the Great Lakes, disguise the exploitation on which the system is based; they suggest that everything has been spontaneously achieved, by order of Nature, not struggled for by alienated labour. Note the way that he forms his descriptions from passive constructions, thereby obscuring the role played by workers and slaves as unwilling agents.

So Redburn's 'Reminiscences', while adequately conveying the extent and the nature of the capitalist enterprise, do not question its justice. They praise the fact that in the mid-century, London was 'only seven or eight hours' travel by railroad from where I was' (R 223), but fail to consider the morality of extending the tracks to Tahiti (by conquest) by only 1875. They compare the dock walls to the Great Wall of China, but suppress the fact that British opium exports to that nation doubled between 1844 and 1870.<sup>6</sup> The picture of the world presented by Redburn is highly selective. His 'Reminiscences' are capitalist propaganda.

This point is especially true when we consider those aspects of his description that might be thought to exhibit his sensitivity to poverty and deprivation. Of the dock-wall beggars, he says:

I can not say that the seamen did much to relieve the destitution which three times every day was presented to their view. Perhaps habit had made them callous; but the truth might have been that very few of them had much money to give. Yet the beggars must have had some inducement to infest the dock walls as they did. (R 207)

Notice the way Redburn distances himself from the sailors (a point that will be returned to later); he himself assumes no responsibility for the poverty, and seems to question the beggars' motives by associating them with disease and epidemic. Although he constantly stresses that he is also poor, and thus unable to offer charity, the fact is that as an enthusiastic apologist for the system, he cannot bring himself to challenge it; to make a real appeal for the beggars would amount to this. Similarly, when he comments about the people who retrieve bodies from the water for cash, he says: 'There seems to be no calamity overtaking man, that can not be rendered merchantable' (R 198). Again, this is not criticism, however it may appear; Redburn is simply revolted by the: 'horrid old men and women ... constantly prying about the docks, searching after bodies' (R 198). Most strikingly of all, however it may seem, the Launcelott's-Hey incident does not attack developing capitalism.

Redburn devotes an entire chapter to describing the horrific death of a woman and her children in a cellar beneath a warehouse. His prose is pungent:

There, some fifteen feet below the walk, crouching in nameless squalor, with her head bowed over, was the figure of what had been a woman. Her blue arms folded to her livid bosom two shrunken things like children, that leaned toward her, one on each side. At first, I knew not whether they were alive or dead. They made no sign; they did not move or stir; but from the vault came that soul-sickening wail. (R 199)

Yet his description protects the audience from the reality of poverty by ensuring that the readers do not view the woman in the face. Thus he associates the family with pictorial and novelistic representations of woe, rather than with the hard facts of it. Consequently, Redburn disguises his own callousness, for he says: 'at that moment I never thought of relieving

them' (R 199), and even when he does relent, he concentrates on persuading others to help rather than himself. Only once he has exhausted all candidates does he steal some bread from his boarding-house and take it to them. Deciding not to drag them into the street, he then permits them to 'die in seclusion' (R 203). Has this charitable venture achieved anything? Clearly not on a practical level, for the woman bluntly refuses his food, knowing that it is only a token gesture impassive before the forces which placed her in the cellar. On a narrative level, however, Redburn has achieved much, for he has succeeded in sentimentalising the family's suffering, and so in capturing his readers' attention. This point is clear at the end of the chapter:

But again I looked down into the vault, and in fancy beheld the pale, shrunken forms still crouching there. Ah! what are our creeds, and how do we hope to be saved? Tell me, oh Bible, that story of Lazarus again, that I may find comfort in my heart for the poor and forlorn. Surrounded as we are by the wants and woes of our fellow-men, and yet given to follow our own pleasures, regardless of their pains, are we not like people sitting up with a corpse, and making merry in the house of the dead? (R 204)

Far from challenging an exploitative system, Redburn has dissolved his description into rhetoric typical of the sentimental novel, with its contemporary addiction to painful, lingering deaths.<sup>7</sup>

The emigrants' plight receives similar treatment. Although Redburn adequately describes the social tensions between poor emigrants and rich travellers on the Highlander (R 286), and although he says they were 'packed like slaves in a slaveship', his dominant tone is sentimental. He submerges his awareness of the economics of the human trade (see Chapter 47), beneath the romanticised figure of Carlo and his organ:

Play on, play on! for to every note come trooping, now, triumphant standards, armies marching - all the pomp of sound. Methinks I am Xerxes, the nucleus of the martial neigh of all the Persian studs. Like gilded damask-flies, thick clustering on some lofty bough, my satraps swarm around me. (R 274)



At the end of Redburn's 'Reminiscences', Carlo, a poor Italian boy, is made to sweep ashore in New York harbour like a conquering tyrant; and the pain of the other emigrants is forgotten (R 327). Likewise, the O'Regan and O'Brien families are romanticised, and their huge brood of children, daily baths and frequent Bible reading, turned into the basis of another of Redburn's musings:

I never could look at these little fellows without an inexplicable feeling coming over me; and though there was nothing so very remarkable or unprecedented about them, except the singular coincidence of two sisters simultaneously making the world such a generous present; yet, the mere fact of their being twins always seemed curious. (R 294)

In each of these cases, the emigrants become 'talking-points' for Redburn in the construction of a sentimental narrative. Their sufferings are eventually merely smothered by pan-American proclamation:

Let us waive that agitated national topic, as to whether such multitudes of foreign poor should be landed on our American shores; let us waive it, with the one only thought, that if they can get here, they have God's right to come, though they bring all Ireland and her miseries with them. For the whole world is the patrimony of the whole world. (R 318)

Chiming well with previous comments (R 185), it is significant that Redburn's tone again distances him from the emigrants' real situation; he cares little for 'their' fate, and is magnanimous in his welcome only because more people are constantly required by the capitalist wave, which in the U.S., has a whole continent still to populate.

Thus Redburn's 'Reminiscences' are neither critical of contemporary commercial developments, nor naive in their assessment. Recognising the complexity and inter-relatedness of capitalism, they also suppress its darker products. They generate an excitement about the increase in trade that eventually imposes platitudes in place of rigorous analysis, and novelistic 'entertainment' in place of challenging the status quo. Far from

being the memoirs of a naive boy on his first voyage, they are the considered narrative of an older man, an apologist for the system. While they may indicate much that is true about the nineteenth-century world, they actually represent this world in a biased way.

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#### 11) Wellingborough Redburn - The Narrator

The 'Reminiscences' are clearly a projection; a studied composition. The narrator, who is a class-specific, representative figure like all previous Melville narrators, produces his memoirs to accord with his own political attitudes and prerogatives. They are designed to celebrate capitalist commerce, while mystifying its basis in extortion. It is, however, interesting that in this novel the implied background of other characters is filled out more than in previous Melville texts. This is perhaps a feature of Melville's more direct engagement with Western society in this and the subsequent books; but the narrators' tendency to 'inform' us should always be treated with suspicion.

As Redburn establishes in the first chapter, he is of genteel birth; this fact overrides his family's subsequent misfortunes. His house is full of objects that indicate the family's status: books, prints and furniture that were collected by his merchant father from around the world. The most important of these objects, however, is a social talisman, that recalls not only his father, but also another relative, a man prominent in the early Republic. It was:

An old-fashioned glass ship, about eighteen inches long, and of French manufacture, which my father, some thirty years before, had brought home from Hamburgh as a present to a great-uncle of mine; Senator Wellingborough, who had died a member of Congress in the days of the old Constitution, and after whom I had the honor of being named. Upon the decease of the Senator, the ship was returned to the donor. (R 12)

Here many marks of the elite can be seen: social dominance, familial solidarity, and the sense of class continuity established by the choice of names. In this light, it is irrelevant that Redburn will himself inherit little wealth, for he inherits status, which is just as important. Although he is jealous of his rich relations, who do not have to work hard for their living (R 44), the important point is that he shares their social attitudes.

This is indicated very clearly in the way that he interacts with other people; he consistently marks himself out as a member of the elite by the passions that he demonstrates, and the tone that he uses. In a repetition of the trope established in Tommo's relationship with Toby and Taji's with Jarl, for instance, Redburn attempts to engage a Lancashire boy in pleasant talk; his frustration parallels that of his predecessors:

I was glad to have some company, and tried to get him conversing; but found he was the most stupid and ignorant boy I had ever met with. I asked him something about the river Thames; when he said that he hadn't travelled any in America and didn't know any thing about the rivers here. And when I told him that the river Thames was in England, he showed no surprise or shame at his ignorance, but only looked ten times more stupid than before. (R 33)

This is not simple innocence, but a bigoted response to the genuinely untutored which emphasises Redburn's education and class-awareness. It shows how Melville repeatedly employed certain kinds of demonstrative situations in his fiction.

Similarly revealing is the fact that Redburn was a member of a Temperance Society (R 52) (one of the planks of the elite's system of



social control), and also that he is thoroughly religious, in a particularly snobbish way:

Nothing daunted, therefore, by thinking of my being a stranger in the land; nothing daunted by the architectural superiority and costliness of any Liverpool church; or by the streams of silk dresses and fine broadcloth coats flowing into the aisles; I used humbly to present myself before the sexton, as a candidate for admission. (R 224)

Here he pontificates on his apparent poverty when compared with the rest of the congregation, not to satirise their pretension, but to claim his rightful social place among them as 'a foreigner of distinction' (R 224). This class-specific attitude to religion is also demonstrated when he describes the services for sailors in the floating chapel:

Never have I heard religious discourses better adapted to an audience of men, who, like sailors, are chiefly, if not only, to be moved by the plainest of precepts, and demonstrations of the misery of sin, as conclusive and undeniable as those of Euclid. No mere rhetoric avails with such men; fine periods are vanity. You can not touch them with tropes. They need to be pressed home with plain facts. (R 194)

Note the distance implied between Redburn and the sailors; he happily prescribes 'suitable' religion for them, while simultaneously establishing his social 'credentials' to justify his attitudes. Indeed, this comment, with its oddly foregrounded remarks on language, reveals the extent to which the elite reads rhetoric and tropes, and attempts to tailor them to its audience. Here Redburn's calculating method is clearly apparent.

Indeed, it is with the sailors that Redburn's social attitudes can perhaps most obviously be seen. Characteristically (just as his predecessors did), he uses his language to 'situate' them, and so constitute his own difference from them. In a series of related chapters, he anatomises men such as the cook, the steward, and another sailor, Blunt. In each case, he turns the subject of his description into a supposed object for ridicule. For example, he describes the Black cook as

a typically God-fearing member of: 'one of those negro churches, which are to be found in New York' (R 95). Nevertheless, he finds fault with the quality of his religion:

But notwithstanding his religious studies and meditations, this old fellow used to use some bad language occasionally; particularly of cold, wet, stormy mornings, when he had to get up before daylight and make his fire; with the sea breaking over the bows, and now and then dashing into his stove, (R 95)

Similarly, the steward (another Afro-American), is said to be effeminate in dress, and this is used to make a further jibe at the cook's genuine faith:

He had claret-colored suits, and snuff-colored suits, and red velvet vests, and buff and brimstone pantaloons, and several full suits of black, which, with his dark-colored face, made him look quite clerical; like a serious young colored gentleman of Barbadoes, about to take orders, (R 96)

Both of these men are portrayed as entertaining 'characters', as is Blunt, for whom Redburn has almost unlimited contempt. Not only does he satirise Blunt's hypochondria and fear of greying hair (R 102), but he derives great capital from the sailor's reliance on a 'Dream Book', which he unfortunately cannot read, let alone interpret:

Now, Blunt revered, adored, and worshipped this *Bonaparte Dream Book* of his; and was fully persuaded that between those red covers, and in his own dreams, lay all the secrets of futurity. Every morning, before taking his pills, and applying his hair-oils, he would steal out of his bunk before the rest of the watch were awake; take out his pamphlet, and a bit of chalk; and then straddling his chest, begin scratching his oily head to remember his fugitive dreams; marking down strokes on his chest-lid, as if he were casting his daily accounts, (R 104)

The literate and manipulative Redburn seems to derive great satisfaction from observing Blunt's untutored (and incoherent?) scratching and marking.

This attempt to categorise the sailors reaches its climax in chapter twenty-nine, where Redburn reveals his true prejudices:

There are classes of men in the world, who bear the same relation to society at large, that the wheels do to a coach; and are just as indispensable. But however easy and delectable the springs upon which the insiders pleasantly vibrate; however sumptuous the hammer-cloth, and glossy the door-panels; yet, for all this, the wheels must still revolve in dusty, or muddy revolutions. No contrivance, no sagacity can lift *them* out of the mire; for upon something

the coach must be bottomed; on something the insiders must roll, (R 153)

This is a startling analysis. Against his previous question whether sailors' ills can be 'ameliorated', Redburn proposes an argument based on social and economic 'necessity'; so long as there are people who must ride in comfort, sailors will continue to be used and trodden down. Those who ride in comfort are, of course, the members of the elite, (which Redburn himself represents), and thus although he acknowledges sailors' indispensibility, he is sanguine that their position will never be changed:

Now, sailors form one of these wheels; they go and come round the globe; they are the true importers, and exporters of spices and silks; of fruits and wines and marbles; they carry missionaries, ambassadors [sic.], opera-singers, armies, merchants, tourists, scholars to their destination; they are a bridge of boats across the Atlantic; they are the *primum mobile* of all commerce; and, in short, were they to emigrate in a body to man the navies of the moon, almost every thing would stop here on earth except its revolution on its axis, and the orators in the American Congress ... But can sailors, one of the wheels of this world, be wholly lifted up from the mire? There seems not much chance for it, (R 154)

So as narrator, Redburn consistently differentiates himself from the people among whom he works. 'Situating' the crew, presenting them as vignettes for the readers' enjoyment, he reinforces his status as an elitist representative. Wandering around Liverpool, he is a connoisseur of manners and taste who feels confident that he may expatiate on all matters of social policy. In doing so, he constantly underlines his status:

For I am an admirer of church architecture; and though, perhaps, the sums spent in erecting magnificent cathedrals might better go to the founding of charities, yet since these structures are built, those who disapprove them in one sense, may as well have the benefit of them in another, (R 223)

Since the novel's publication, critics have insisted upon Redburn's naivety: the novel is 'the narrative of a mere lad', a 'narrative of disillusionment, as boyish dreams are exploded', a 'rite of passage', and a record of 'initiation'. Yet Redburn's appreciation of architecture shows some sophistication; an insight he extends to social processes.<sup>2</sup> Even when



at the start of the journey he locks himself away to dress up in his new clothes, he is not demonstrating boyish enthusiasm, but calculating the impression that he will make aboard ship:

After dinner I went into my room, locked the door carefully, and hung a towel over the knob, so that no one should peep through the keyhole, and then went to trying on my red woolen [sic] shirt before the glass, to see what sort of a looking sailor I was going to make, (P 30)

At other times, his political awareness is even more acute. For instance, he says of his brother's friend Mr. Jones, who helps him find the Highlander:

The fact was, that my young friend (for he was only about twenty-five) was not a very wise man; and this was a huge fib, which out of the kindness of his heart, he told in my behalf, for the purpose of creating a profound respect for me in the eyes of my future lord. And thus, by his ill-advised, but well-meaning hints concerning the respectability of my paternity, and the immense wealth of my relations, did this really honest-hearted but foolish friend of mine, prevent me from getting three dollars in advance, which I greatly needed, (P 23)

Similarly, he comments of the emigrants:

But thus it is, that the very hardships to which such beings are subjected, instead of uniting them, only tends, by imbittering [sic,] their tempers, to set them against each other; and thus they themselves drive the strongest rivet into the chain, by which their social superiors hold them subject, (P 289)

Perhaps most interestingly of all, however, he shows that he understands the nature of advertising, that crucial element of capitalist economics:

These army advertisements are well fitted to draw recruits in Liverpool. Among the vast number of emigrants, who daily arrive from all parts of Britain to embark for the United States or the colonies, there are many young men, who, upon arriving at Liverpool, find themselves next to penniless; or, at least, with only enough money to carry them over the sea, without providing for future contingencies. How easily and naturally, then, may such youths be induced to enter upon the military life, which promises them a free passage to the most distant and flourishing colonies, and certain pay for doing nothing; besides holding out hopes of vineyards and farms, to be verified in the fullness of time, (P 214)

Such a situation, it may be thought, is evocative of his own at the start of his narrative, when his 'young inland imagination' responded to the

advertisement for the 'coppered and copper-fastened brig Leda' (R 7). Remembering that his 'Reminiscences' are the retrospective creation of an older man, who at the time of his writing must already have drawn his insights from his Liverpool experience, it is clear that the young Redburn of the opening chapters is specifically created as a 'naive' version of the older narrator. Perhaps alarmingly for the reader who wishes to enjoy an ironic detachment from the boy Wellingborough, he is just as much a construct of the narrator, as the narrator is a construct of the author. 'Young' Redburn is a tool in the narrator's elitist self-presentation in his narrative.

This fact of the 'time lag' between Redburn's voyage and the writing of his 'Reminiscences' is of great importance. An article by Merlin Bowen summarises the early debate among critics such as Gilman and Matthiessen, and establishes that as in *Omoo*: 'the narrator in each is some years distant from the action he records' (p.102).<sup>9</sup> This allows Bowen to make the significant statement: 'that older Redburn ... is as truly independent a fictional character as Conrad's Marlow' (p.101). Yet Bowen does not push this analysis, and concludes that the developing narrator, while changed by his experiences and different from his earlier self, is closely identified with Melville the author (see p.102). Other critics, however, are more rigorous:

But the reader who recognizes the difference between Wellingborough the actor and Redburn the narrator and Melville the artistic manipulator, begins to suspect, pretty soon, that while Redburn the narrator is laughing at Wellingborough the actor, Melville is also laughing at them both.<sup>10</sup>

My analysis differs from these in two ways. First, it sees both Redburns as the object of pejorative criticism, certainly not humour. Secondly, it detaches the younger Redburn from the older narrator,

suggesting that this younger figure is a narrative strategy, constructed in accordance with the narrator's political ends. Sensitivity to this structural point is vital when reading Melville's novels.

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iii) The young Redburn's 'construct' nature

Not only is Redburn a thoroughly class-bound presence, his younger projection is a compound persona, an amalgam of popular heroes from other sea stories. Two forbears are particularly identifiable; Peter Simple and the young Richard Dana.

Peter Simple, the hero of Maryatt's eponymous novel (1837), which was a 'better seller' in the U.S., is an ingenuous idiot, sent to sea to gain experience of life. In the tradition of Smollett's Roderick Random, and of other Maryatt heroes, Simple ends up in all kinds of scrapes - drinking, wenching, and completely failing to understand naval terminology or discipline. As he says of himself: 'I replied that I certainly was considered the greatest fool of our family.'<sup>1</sup> Clearly, his attraction as a stereotype for Redburn is that his guilelessness permits the narrator to suggest that he was just as innocent. It is from his claims to identity with Simple that the 'naive' tradition associated with Redburn is derived. 'The idea of throwing a simple and innocent-minded lad, just fresh from home, into the midst of the roughness, rudeness, and startling novelty of the ship, may be found in *Peter Simple*', wrote one reviewer, thereby demonstrating Redburn's acute knowledge of the sense of expectations with which the contemporary audience approached its reading.'<sup>2</sup>



A good example of this narratorial tactic can be seen when Redburn first arrives on the Highlander:

When I reached the deck, I saw no one but a large man in a large dripping pea-jacket, who was calking down the main-hatches.  
'What do you want, Pillgarlic?' said he.  
'I've shipped to sail in this ship,' I replied, assuming a little dignity, to chastise his familiarity.  
'What for? a tailor?' said he, looking at my shooting jacket.  
I answered that I was going as a 'boy;' for so I was technically put down on the articles.  
'Well,' said he, 'have you got your traps aboard?'  
I told him that I didn't know there were any rats in the ship, and hadn't brought any 'trap.'  
At this he laughed out with a great guffaw, and said there must be hay-seed in my hair, (P 31)

Here the scene is ostensibly good-natured, and with its exploitation of Redburn's 'ignorance' of maritime terminology, clearly evokes *Peter Simple*. Yet the fact that the narrator uses the term 'calking', and obviously knows what it means, reminds us that the description is retrospective, and is being 'laid on' for our engrossment. Similarly, the little attempt to 'chastise' the mate coheres perfectly with the narrator's class-assumptions. Beneath the humorous veneer, we can see the narrator at work to present his younger self as a character in the Peter Simple tradition. The reality of the narrator's early experiences is unobtainable, because he constantly portrays them as if they are fictional.

Thus as his series of exploits continues, it becomes progressively less possible to see the young Redburn as anything other than an artful abstraction; the comedy becomes slowly more hollow. For instance, although the episode when he 'contemplates a social call' on the captain can still be read as funny, it is deeply imbued with elitist prejudice and self-importance:

I left them all tittering, and coming on deck was passing the cook-house, when the old cook called after me, saying I had forgot my cane.  
But I did not heed their impudence, and was walking straight toward the cabin-door on the quarter-deck, when the chief mate met me. I touched my hat, and

was passing him, when, after staring at me till I thought his eyes would burst out, he all at once caught me by the collar, and with a voice of thunder, wanted to know what I meant by playing such tricks aboard a ship that he was mate of? (R 81)

In the light of his previous 'pity and compassion' for the sailors, whom he sees as 'outcasts from good society' (R 55), this assault on the cabin is actually a narratorial tactic, which hopes to disguise latent prejudice by invoking the example of a popular fictional figure.

Similar considerations underlie the narrator's use of his other literary forbear, Dana. Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840) was massively popular in the U.S. - it is difficult for us to grasp today its influence on the contemporary American literary scene. T.O. Philbrick, however, whose book *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* is the best analysis of this significant genre to date, also emphasises that *Two Years* affected work far beyond the sea novel '[It] initiated the genre of journey narratives that was to play a central role in the literature of the American Renaissance'.<sup>13</sup> To recall Dana, then, was for Redburn to place his 'Reminiscences' firmly in the tradition of an established classic.

Various elements of his narrative are very similar to Dana's, ranging through the division of the crew into watches, the washing of the decks, the sighting of another ship at sea, the first ascent of the mast, and, most closely of all, the description of the second mate's duties. Eschewing his humorous stance, Redburn here copies Dana almost verbatim. He does so to identify with the earlier author's authority, and thereby to deflect any imputation of unreliability in his own narration:

But so far as the second mate is concerned, his titles are the only dignities he enjoys; for, upon the whole, he leads a puppyish life indeed. He is not deemed company at any time for the captain, though the chief mate occasionally is, at least deck-company, though not in the cabin; and besides this, the second mate has to breakfast, lunch, dine, and sup off the leavings of the

cabin table . (P 47-48)

Here the shadow of Dana is very useful to Redburn, for by recalling him, he can reinforce his own position. This is because Dana was very much the elitist figure - a lawyer of good birth he went to sea as a cure for ill health and having made his voyage returned to a very profitable Boston practice, eventually being dubbed the 'Duke of Cambridge'.<sup>14</sup> So for the elitist Redburn it is highly profitable to claim community with this figure; it is a good selling-point for his narrative, and adds to its 'factual appearance'.<sup>15</sup>

Yet it should not be forgotten that in using *Two Years*, just as in employing *Peter Simple*, the narrator is fictionalising his own origins. By manipulating a tradition, he establishes a figure in the early stages of his narrative that seems both attractive and authoritative. As a result, his class-motivation seems obscured. After research, however, it is clear both that Redburn is class-motivated, and that his narrative is certainly not factual. While Redburn's ostensibly 'naive' self-presentation is actually no more than a narrative con, because his voice and manipulation of humour are so beguiling, one can only penetrate his strategem either by looking for the flaws in his narrative or by attending to the figures whom he attempts to suppress. It is to this project that I now turn, but it has been important to reach some conclusion about the narrator's status, and his attitude to his narrative. The construct 'young' Redburn emphasises the fabricated nature of the entire 'Reminiscences', and impresses the order of 'events' upon the reader: voyage, 'writing up', reception. Chronology will be seen to be equally significant in *Moby-Dick*.



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iv) The narrator's 'bland' intentions

In using the Dana and Maryatt texts, Redburn assembles his narrative as his predecessors do, by manipulating characters and conventions; in these cases, he uses the sea-story genre, just like the narrator of *Omoo*, to create a 'novelistic' image of life on the Highlander. Like his predecessors, however, he also uses the travel narrative, pre-eminently in his description of Liverpool. Here he acts as the stereo-typed tourist, aiming to describe all that he sees for his elitist audience. Consequently, his narrative is loaded with the usual catch-phrases: 'Here it must be mentioned' (R 144); 'But first, I must mention' (R 150); 'As the description of any one of these Liverpool docks will pretty much answer for all' (R 178); 'Concerning the cost of the docks' (R 179); 'It was diverting to observe' (R 182); 'Upon one occasion' (R 183); 'There was hardly anything in the docks that interested me more' (R 184); 'As if to symbolize this state of things'. This is all typical, and in its context serves to reduce the impact of any social criticism by turning it into 'spectacle'. As in many nineteenth-century realist novels, these phrases 'harmonise' the narration and smooth over the details of extortion and labour which they supposedly present.<sup>16</sup>

On another occasion, however, when Redburn shapes his narrative to cohere with the representative pattern of a nineteenth-century American tourist trip to Britain, he combines travel with the humorous portrayal of the earlier chapters. On a Sunday afternoon he decides to take a stroll out into the country and apparently intends to see the 'real England'. According to contemporary guide-books this only began beyond the confines of the port, in the English countryside, and initially culminated in a visit

to Chester, the first 'real' (i.e. picture-book) city. 'On Thursday I went with Mr. Ticknor to Chester by railway. It is quite an indescribable old town; and I feel, at last, as if I had had a glimpse of Old England', wrote Nathaniel Hawthorne in his journal.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, Redburn sets out; but his walk is constantly interrupted. First, he nearly stumbles into a man-trap, and is later moved on by a game-keeper. Then, while worshipping in a country church, he says that the congregation: 'gazed and gazed; but as I was all attention to the sermon -- they did not expel me, as at first I almost imagined they might' (R 232). Finally, he has to run the gauntlet of a suspicious woman, who is angered that her husband should invite him in for tea with her family, and attempts to rid herself of him as quickly as possible (R 236).

The point about each of these occurrences is that Redburn's tone indicates no anger with his treatment at all. On the contrary, he is positively euphoric:

It was the most delightful of meals; the three charmers sat all on one side, and I opposite, between the old man and his wife. The middle charmer poured out the souchong, and handed me the buttered muffins; and such buttered muffins never were spread on the other side of the Atlantic. The butter had an aromatic flavor; by Jove, it was perfectly delicious. (R 235)

While cataloguing a series of injustices, he can thus suggest that his stroll accords with the pattern of an American tourist expedition. This disjunction shows that the walk is another literary confection, designed as a quasi-comic interlude to entertain Redburn's readers. It is not a naive effusion but a trick calculated to disarm the public. Yet because it is disrupted, although the walk demonstrates the extent to which Redburn was willing to shape his narrative, it also shows that the narrative is not 'easily achieved' by Redburn. To expose this point is also to expose Redburn's political motivation.<sup>18</sup>

The reason why Redburn resorts to all of these tactics can also be seen in the most elaborate of them all; his manipulation of the Liverpool guide-book. This book, which his father took with him on his visit to the city, is one of Redburn's most cherished possessions. He has brought it with him in the hope that he can retrace his father's footsteps and so reanimate that now lifeless corpse. Yet in his treatment of the guide, his comic persona merges with something much more sinister.

In Chapter 31, Redburn tells us that he tried to commit the entire guide to memory on the ship, so that when he arrived, he could wander around without it:

I mastered the columns of statistics, touching the advance of population; and pored over them, as I used to do over my multiplication-table. For I was determined to make the whole subject my own; and not be content with a mere smattering of the thing, as is too much the custom with most students of guide-books. (R 165)

While even this could be yet another exhibition of naive enthusiasm, his subsequent discomfiture is clearly played for laughs:

The men stopped at a curious old tavern, near the Prince's Dock's walls; and having my guide-book in my pocket, I drew it forth to compare notes, when I found, that precisely upon the spot where I and my shipmates were standing, and a cherry-cheeked bar-maid was filling their glasses, my infallible old Morocco, in that very place, located a fort; adding, that it was well worth the intelligent stranger's while to visit it for the purpose of beholding the guard relieved in the evening.

This was a staggerer; for how could a tavern be mistaken for a castle? and this was the hour mentioned for the guard to turn out; yet not a red coat was to be seen. (R 166)

As if to underline the fact that we are meant to smile at the foolish youth, Redburn helpfully proclaims:

'Dear delusion!

It never occurred to my boyish thoughts, that though a guide-book, fifty years old, might have done good service in its day, yet it would prove but a miserable cicerone to the modern. (R 166)

Consequently, the whole chapter is made into a series of reversals, as Redburn finds that literally everything recorded in the guide-book is



now wrong. This only prepares for the most important statement of all, which is far from being the 'revolutionary' acceptance of change that it can at first seem to be:

Here, now, oh, Wellingborough, thought I, learn a lesson, and never forget it. This world, my boy, is a moving world, its Riddough's Hotels are forever being pulled down; it never stands still, (R 172)

Neatly inserted into the tragi-comedy of Redburn's 'naive' awakening comes this most insidiously political of comments. Suddenly speaking in the voice of the adult narrator (who has been marshalling his younger projection throughout the narrative), Redburn here demonstrates his elitist allegiances more strongly than at any other time in his 'Reminiscences'; he pronounces the bland words that justify any amount of oppression. Reinforcing them with a comment about Christian 'truth', Redburn suggests that 'progress' is inevitable, and that we must inevitably acquiesce in it (a form of world-weary conservatism which is central to the satire of Melville's next book *White-Jacket*):

Every age makes its own guide-books, and the old ones are used for waste paper. But there is one Holy Guide-Book, Wellingborough, that will never lead you astray, if you but follow it aright; and some noble monuments that remain, though the pyramids crumble, (R 172)

In other words, he here justifies all the economic and spiritual deprivation in Liverpool that he claims elsewhere to repudiate. As I argued initially, Redburn's narrative is actually a massive piece of elitist capitalist propaganda, and it is in platitudes like this that its purpose is consummated. While generations of readers have acquiesced in Redburn's consciously created 'comic' persona, and been gulled by his allegiance to the famous Mr. Dana, they have also been tricked by these seemingly anodyne words. In fact, these passages, of which there are a number in the 'Reminiscences', cohere perfectly with the narrator's consistent political

prerogative; the achievement of the elite's self-interested industrial revolution, and the disguising of this enterprise's partisan objective. One modern victim is Harold Beaver. In his Introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel, he is often fairly aggressive about *Redburn's* social intent, speaking of the terrible conditions to be found in Liverpool (p.14). Nevertheless, Beaver nullifies this position by responding to Redburn's platitudes in this way:

Reality itself, then, is inaccessible - like historic Liverpool, or the *Port-a-Ferry* in the King's Dock, so often renewed that only their names are left. Not *what* we learn, then, but *how* should impel the course; not to live by fixed ideas but by ideas in flux; not in static *being* but in an eternal *becoming*; not with single meaning but with permanent shift of meaning; and ultimately, perhaps with *no* meaning.

This is to conclude precisely what the elitist Redburn wishes us to conclude; metaphysics replaces outrage, and the system itself remains intact.<sup>12</sup>

Hidden under a cloud of declamatory rhetoric, Redburn repeatedly proposes a liberal status quo that challenges nothing. In addition to the above instance, as I have already shown, he suggests that poor conditions for sailors are inevitable. He is fulsome on this subject:

But we must not altogether despair for the sailor; nor need those who toil for his good be at bottom disheartened. For Time must prove his friend in the end; and though sometimes he would almost seem as a neglected step-son of heaven, permitted to run on and riot out his days with no hand to restrain him, while others are watched over and tenderly cared for; yet we feel and we know that God is the true Father of all, and that none of his children are without the pale of his care. (R 154 my emphasis)

Similarly, while relishing the fact that his father's friend Roscoe (and thus by imputation his father) took a leading role in ending the African slave trade (R 171), Redburn is repeatedly racist in his remarks about Afro-Americans. Adopting his hieratic tone, he says:

And here, I must not omit one thing, that struck me at the time. It was the absence of negroes; who in the large towns in the 'free states' of America, almost always form a considerable portion of the destitute. But in these

streets, not a negro was to be seen. All were whites; and with the exception of the Irish, were natives of the soil; even Englishmen; as much Englishmen, as the dukes in the House of Lords. This conveyed a strange feeling; and more than any thing else, reminded me that I was not in my own land. For *there*, such a being as a native beggar is almost unknown; and to be a born American citizen seems a guarantee against pauperism; and this, perhaps, springs from the virtue of a vote, (R 222)

This comment is riddled with half-expressed attitudes: first Redburn implies that there are no native Afro-Americans - the only native Americans are white; then he implies that the vote magically prohibits poverty - both statements are manifestly false. Next, however, he disparages the demeanour of black sailors in Liverpool:

Speaking of negroes, recalls the looks of interest with which negro-sailors are regarded when they walk the Liverpool streets. In Liverpool indeed the negro steps with a prouder pace, and lifts his head like a man; for here, no such exaggerated feeling exists in respect to him, as in America. Being so young and inexperienced then, and unconsciously swayed in some degree by those local and social prejudices, that are the marring of most men, and from which, for the mass, there seems no possible escape; at first I was surprised that a colored man should be treated as he is in this town; but a little reflection showed that, after all, it was but recognizing his claims to humanity and normal equality. (R 222 my emphasis)

Again, Redburn apparently repudiates his youthful racial prejudice; but as the underlined sections show, the narrative is actually that of the older man, and it is still imbued with prejudice.

The other most striking passages of rhetorical conservatism purporting to be radical are those which deal with emigration. Although I have already considered one of these (above), a further example will underline the point. Thus, speaking of the German emigrants, Redburn says:

There is something in the contemplation of the mode in which America has been settled, that, in a noble breast, should forever extinguish the prejudices of national dislikes,

Settled by the people of all nations, all nations may claim her for her own. We are not a nation, so much as a world. On this Western Hemisphere all tribes and people are forming into one federated whole; and there is a future which shall see the estranged children of Adam restored as to the old hearth-stone in Eden, (R 185)

Here is another distortion; a misrepresentation of both the fate that the



emigrants will have to suffer, and a specific denial of the racial exclusion on which the U.S. is posited, because the word 'tribe' recalls not just the imported Africans but also the dispossessed American-Indians.

All of these comments are designed for show. They are trite verbiage designed to disguise the reality of the elite's capitalist economic and social system, and Redburn's role as its apologist. When the Highlander returns to New York, he proclaims:

Hurra! hurra! and ten thousand times hurra! down goes our old anchor, fathoms down into the free and independent Yankee mud, one handful of which was now worth a broad manor in England. (P 327)

This is only another ruse; if we stop to think what we are rejoicing about, we are celebrating the carriage of more men and women as fodder for the developing factories of the 'billion dollar country'. Redburn's 'Reminiscences' are a complex tissue of projections and rhetorical statements that intend to justify, and even glamorise, the policies of the social class which he represents. Far from criticising this system, they actually promote it.<sup>20</sup>

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#### v) Melville's larger object - Destabilising

In one sense, then, Melville has achieved his aims in *Redburn* by again demonstrating and exposing the legitimating processes of the nineteenth-century elite. In the novel, he considers the role of rhetoric and misrepresentation in the developing capitalism of the Western world. He reveals the sheer power of elitist propaganda by showing that even

some-one such as Redburn, who feels dispossessed by the system, will create an elaborate narrative to justify and hide its processes under bland statements. The fact that someone who is as poor as the narrator will yet remain loyal to the values of the elite testifies both to their pervasive social hold and to Melville's recognition of this fact. But in *Redburn*, as in all his previous novels, Melville extended his criticism of the elite by subverting its own representative strategies.

Perception of this point depends again upon recognising the extent to which Melville as author differentiates himself from his narrator. In fact, this authorial distancing is even more obvious in *Redburn* than before.

First, the narrator typically demonstrates the way in which he assembles his narrative. I have already given some examples of this when showing how Redburn exploits the travel genre, but there are many others. For instance, he says: 'of this sailor, I shall have something more to say, as I get on with my narrative; so I will here try to describe him a little' (R 66), and he also remarks: 'but I must quit this rambling, and return to my story' (R 77). Later he comments: 'As I wish to group together what fell under my observation concerning the Liverpool docks, and the scenes roundabout, I will try to throw into this chapter various minor things that I recall' (R 212). Finally he says: 'The closing allusion to Jackson in the chapter preceding, reminds me of a circumstance - which, perhaps, should have been mentioned before' (R 300). - These tags occur throughout Redburn's memoirs; I have given only a few examples of them.

Yet Melville's own authorial involvement is also detectable. In *Redburn* he acts almost as an editor who stands outside the organised space of the narrator's complex narrative, intent on circumscribing its

effect. The 'Reminiscences' are 'framed' with a series of satirical chapter titles - comments such as 'Redburn Deferentially Discourses Concerning the Prospects of Sailors' or 'Redburn Grows Intolerably Flat and Stupid over Some Outlandish Old Guide-Books' - but these should not be seen as Melville's satire of the narrator. Although their origin is uncertain, like the scroll in *Mardi*, they are correctly part of the narrator's own humorous self-presentation.

More potently, Melville uses his subversive technique of allowing Redburn to incriminate himself in the choice of genres that he exploits - just as, for instance, Tommo's exploitation of Stewart and Ellis is self-subverting. Consequently, when Redburn uses Dana, he is actually using one of the arch-propagandists of American economic and cultural expansion. While Dana may add to Redburn's 'authority', he simultaneously endangers the narrator's 'naive' posture, because in effect *Two Years Before the Mast* was an encomium to U.S. trade that brought California into the vision of the elite just before gold was found there, and so contributed to the area being seized as the greatest of the U.S.'s prizes in its war with Mexico.

Hence in encouraging Redburn's choice of Dana as paradigm, Melville also encourages his narrator to betray his own project, for <sup>as</sup> Redburn must <sup>^</sup> carefully balance support for capitalism with protection of its processes, then the use of the flamboyant Dana is potentially risky. Dana was so elitist in his aspirations that even such a generous analyst as Philbrick suggests that he wrote *Two Years* as an effort to secure a captive constituency of sailors for his legal practice.<sup>21</sup> In 'Twenty-four Years After', the sequel to *Two Years*, Dana's priorities are even more clearly displayed:

When I awoke in the morning, and looked from my windows over the city of San Francisco, with its storehouses, towers, and steeples; its court-houses,



theatres, and hospitals; its daily journals; its well-filled professions; its fortresses and lighthouses; its wharves and harbour, with their thousand-ton clipper ships, more in number than London or Liverpool sheltered that day; itself one of the capitals of the American Republic, and the sole emporium of a new world, the awakened Pacific - I could scarcely keep hold on reality at all.<sup>22</sup>

The elisions in this passage echo those in Redburn's descriptions of Liverpool, above.

Redburn is on equally dangerous ground with *Peter Simple*, for Maryatt's novel is actually a satire on the pretensions of its young hero. In it, the author emphasises that Peter succeeds through no intrinsic worth at all; the point is underlined when he finally inherits the title 'Lord Privilege'.

Again, it was perhaps improvident for Redburn to have drawn attention in his 'Reminiscences' to the fact that he had been reading Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Although he typically attempts to turn the episode into a joke, in doing so he ironically draws attention to the hidden processes of capitalism, of which this was the founding text:

Pleasant, though vague visions of future opulence floated before me, as I commenced the first chapter, entitled "*Of the causes of improvement in the productive power of labour*", Dry as crackers and cheese, to be sure; and the chapter itself was not much better. But this was only getting initiated; and if I read on, the grand secret would be opened to me. So I read on and on, about "*wages and profits of labour*", without getting any profits myself for my pains in perusing it. (R 99-100)

Smith's words indicate Redburn's own motivations - wealth and class - and demonstrate the drives which his narrative can hide.

vi) A satirical snare; London

But the novel does not only challenge the contemporary elite by showing Melville's recoil from his narrator, and by satirising the

narrator's injudicious use of sources. *Redburn* also infiltrates the representative processes of society, internally destabilising them, making it almost more like *Mardi* than like *Typee* or *Omoo*.

The character of Harry Bolton and the trip to London are central in this attempt. Redburn's desire to get to London is well-documented in his narrative. On his country ramble he says:

Come, Wellingborough, why not push on for London? - Hurrah! what say you? let's have a peep at St. Paul's! Don't you want to see the queen? Have you no longing to behold the duke? Think of Westminster Abbey, and the Tunnel under the Thames! Think of Hyde Park, and the ladies! (R 233)

And when Harry proposes the trip, he exults: 'London? it could not be! - and Harry - how kind of him!' (R 246). The important point here is that it is Redburn who wishes to get to the capital, and accomplish his Irvingesque tourist dream, with its climax in a visit to Westminster Abbey.<sup>23</sup> Bolton is a construct who fulfils Redburn's desire. This point is emphasised by Redburn's immediately ambivalent attitude to his companion, for while Bolton is at one level a typical well-born elitist (R 238), Redburn is still keen to stress his suspicion, saying 'he was indeed then what he seemed' (R 246). This is because he knows that he will later have to be dropped from the narrative in a way that recalls Long Ghost's treatment in *Omoo*. The elaborate postscript (Chapter 45), in which Redburn justifies abandoning his friend, however, <sup>is</sup> much less elegant a tactic than the romanticised parting with the doctor.

So Bolton eventually becomes an embarrassing tactic, but he gratifies Redburn's immediate desire and takes him to London, which instantly monopolises the narrator's attention: 'Mixed with these thoughts were confused visions of St. Paul's and the Strand, which I determined to

visit the very next morning, before breakfast, or perish in the attempt' (R 251). Of course, Melville is here satirising Redburn's hunger to 'consume' the city. Just as his predecessors wished to digest Pacific island culture, Redburn hopes to gorge himself on the luxury of what was then the greatest metropolis in the world. As both of these impulses were anathema to the author, by showing how his representative narrators are prey to them, he registers his dissent from contemporary elite society. Yet in *Redburn*, Melville intensifies his criticism by frustrating his narrator's project. The trip to London is an interruption in the narrative which exposes Redburn's money-grabbing motivation in the same manner as the progressively bizarre travelogue decentred the narrator of *Mardi*. In Melville's sub-text it is suggested that the image of London which Redburn does see (as opposed to that which he would like to have seen) is an horrific externalization of his own deepest impulses.

Melville centres this image on 'Aladdin's Palace', the gambling-house to which Bolton immediately repairs. Redburn presents this nightmarish place as a symbol of all that is false, repulsive and dehumanising about capitalism:

Long lounges lay carelessly disposed, whose fine damask was interwoven, like the Gobelin tapestry, with pictorial tales of tilt and tourney. And oriental ottomans, whose cunning warp and woof were wrought into plaited serpents, undulating beneath beds of leaves, from which, here and there, they flashed out sudden splendors of green scales and gold ... [there] were such pictures as the high-priests, for a bribe, showed to Alexander in the innermost shrine of the white temple in the Libyan oasis; such pictures as the pontiff of the sun strove to hide from Cortez, when, sword in hand, he burst open the sanctorum of the pyramid-fane at Cholula ... (R 252-3)

Here we can find traces of all those ancient cultures and foreign lands which he had happily enumerated in the Liverpool docks, yet he now combines them to display how capitalism yokes together luxury with moral depravity. He also uses the emphasis on secrecy in Aladdin's Palace, with



only hallucinatory visions of the underlying truth, to demonstrate that the system constantly tries to conceal its extortion, producing a mask of respectability behind which the real business can be done:

Our entrance excited little or no notice; for every body present seemed exceedingly animated about concerns of their own; and a large group was gathered around one tall, military looking gentleman, who was reading some India war-news from the Times, and commenting on it, in a very loud voice, condemning, in toto, the whole campaign. [I] observed that every now and then little parties were made up among the gentlemen, and they retired into the rear of the house, as if going to a private apartment. And I overheard one of them drop the word *Rouge*; but he could not have used rouge, for his face was exceedingly pale. Another said something about *Loo*. (R 251-2)

Indeed, the analogy of economics with gambling reveals the arbitrary nature of capitalist development, and also its effects, in the picture of the distraught Bolton:

'What's the matter, Redburn?' he cried, with a wild sort of laugh - 'you are not afraid of me, are you? - No, no! I believe you, my boy, or you would not hold that purse in your hand; no, nor that letter.' (R 254-5)

Yet Melville's point is that Redburn wishes to go to London, and that he is powerfully attracted by what he sees there, even in the gambling house:

From sculptured stalactites of vine-boughs, here and there pendent hung galaxies of gas lights, whose vivid glare was softened by pale, cream-colored, porcelain spheres, shedding over the place a serene, silver flood; as if every porcelain sphere was a moon; and this superb apartment was the moon-lit garden of Portia at Belmont; and the gentle lovers, Lorenzo and Jessica, lurked somewhere among the vines. (R 250)

Therefore, it is entirely duplicitous for the older Redburn who writes up the story to attempt to deploy his 'naive' mantle, and to suggest that he always suspected that something was amiss, for he still cannot deny the (to him) pleasant magnetism of the scene:

While my friend was gone, I occupied myself with looking around me, and striving to appear as indifferent as possible, and as much used to all this splendor as if I had been born in it. But, to tell the truth, my head was almost dizzy with the strangeness of the sight, and the thought that I was really in London. What would my brother have said? What would Tom Legare, the treasurer of the Juvenile Temperance Society, have thought?

But I almost began to fancy I had no friends and relatives living in a

little village three thousand five hundred miles off, (R 251)

In other words, Redburn's presentation of London both recognises and denies that the capitalist elitist enterprise is founded on appropriated wealth, and concealed behind artificial glamour. Redburn knows this:

I fell into a chair, and gazed round at the strange-looking walls and mysterious pictures, and up to the chandelier at the ceiling; then rose, and opened the door, and looked down the lighted passage; but only heard the hum from the roomful below, scattered voices, and a hushed ivory rattling from the closed apartments adjoining. I stepped back into the room, and a terrible revulsion overcame me; I would have given the world had I been safe back in Liverpool, fast asleep in my old bunk in Prince's Dock, (R 255)

However, he still refuses to acknowledge the import of his experience, and use his 'Reminiscences' to oppose capitalism; a stance which he could have taken. On the contrary, in looking back and in fabricating his narrative he attempts to suppress his guiltily secret.

The effect of the Aladdin's Palace chapters, with their remarkable diction that contrasts so strongly with that employed in the rest of the narrative, is to reveal this suppression on the part of the narrator. They serve as an interruption that conclusively fractures the narrator's 'Reminiscences', and reveals that he has tried to organise his narrative so as to hide his perception of capitalism's horrors. The exaggerated tone indicates Redburn's inability to subdue his memory through his usual tactic of literary 'presentation', and reveals that the whole Bolton episode was an inadvised response to the conventional wish to visit London. As his narrative shows, and as Melville has organised, Redburn has been caught out. This use of a narrative to suppress and deny reality when it could have acknowledged it is resumed in *Moby-Dick*. In both books, Melville hopes that the audience will discern the untruths with which it is being presented, and so repudiate the narrators who are peddling the lies; as a first step to repudiating the system itself.

As with *Mardi*, then, I am stressing Melville's interest in the reactions that occur in the audience during the process of reading. While this is his usual preoccupation, the disruptive elements in these two books make it more easy to discern in them. Catherine Belsey expresses the situation exactly:

It is in the interests of the stability of a class society, that is, it is in the interests of the reproduction of the existing relations of production, to suppress the contradiction in the subject, and it is this process of suppression which, I have argued, characterizes the classic realist text, (Belsey, p.85).

In essence, Melville is producing an 'interrogative text' in *Redburn* by subverting the realist narration of the 'Reminiscences'.

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#### vii) Reception

Unfortunately for Melville's latest attempt to reform elitist sensibilities, *Redburn* suffered a similar fate to its predecessors at the hands of the reviewers. Although it restored his reputation, receiving plaudits for the excellence of its sea-novel description, Melville could not exploit this renewed contact with the literary establishment to direct readers' attentions towards their own preconceptions. Only one reviewer noticed the subversive thrust of the Liverpool passages, remarking: 'he tells of scenes and social systems that must startle, if they produce no further effect' (*Albion* 24 Nov. 1849); most simply pass over these chapters.

Most importantly, though, there is almost universal condemnation both for the London trip and the character of Harry Bolton. Of London, one reviewer wrote: 'we unhesitatingly qualify the whole of this London



expedition as utter rubbish, intended evidently to be very fine and effective, but which utterly misses the mark' - whatever the reviewer thought that mark to be (*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* Nov. 1849). Another similarly comments: 'there are a few palpable inventions - the story of the London Hell for instance - that do not give us a very exalted idea of Mr. Melville's imaginative capacities' (*Holden's Dollar Magazine*). Both of these centre their objections on the style of the passage, recognising that it is an intrusion, but allow this perception to contain any appreciation that they might have had of its social criticism. The only critic who seems to approve of the incident does so because he is apparently impervious to its disruption:

At this stage of the narrative we are introduced to a fancy young gentleman who gets up with Redburn a hurried, romantic night visit to London, which is enveloped in the glare of a splendid gambling establishment. The parties, however, soon get back to duty, and find nothing whatever lurid or romantic in the discipline under Captain Riga, (*Literary World* 17 Nov. 1849)

This remark by Evert Duyckinck is even more alarming, because it shows that key figures in the mid-nineteenth-century American literary scene could simply pass over evidence of blunt social depravity. - While they were clear that they did not like the London interruption, reviewers refused to consider what it could signify.

This evidence highlights Melville's difficulty in conveying his message. Although the structure of *Redburn* is just as carefully contrived as that of *Typee*, the establishment could still neutralise its challenge. The representative status and tone of the narrator could not be more obvious. Melville helpfully adds the words 'the son-of-a-gentleman' to the title page to make it apparent, even if all Redburn's class-bound comments, familial recollections, and typical attitudes have been ignored. Similarly, although the excess of the London passage is soon passed over, the

narrator's little sigh of relief should alert us to its significance: 'I could scarcely credit the events of the last thirty-six hours' (R 260). Moreover, the figure of Bolton hangs around in the narrative causing the narrator huge worry; he cannot rid himself of this now useless construct until they arrive again New York, and so he must tolerate being associated with such a dandy, and thus run the risk of isolation from the crew:

This affair sealed Harry's fate on board of the Highlander; the crew now reckoned him fair play for their worst jibes and jeers, and he led a miserable life indeed, (R 282)

Redburn's tone here indicates the distance he is trying to place between himself and the Englishman, but in other places he is forced to lapse into lyric effusion of the type that characterised the London trip: 'How they hunted you, Harry, my zebra! those ocean barbarians, those unimpressible, uncivilized sailors of ours!' (R 277). This tonal reminiscence reanimates the disruptive function of those chapters as it jars with the travel-narrative description that Redburn sets around it. Nevertheless, although Melville deployed all this anarchic energy in the text and constantly set his narrator problems to control and subdue, the readers and reviewers seem to have blocked his method. The dissonance of Bolton and London could be smoothed away by reimporting the 'pleasure' of the Marryat-like initiation-narrative.

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#### vii) New Developments

However, in *Redburn* Melville had not abandoned his critical stance, nor retreated from his belief that literature could play a significant part in challenging the established order. While Redburn's narrative

'Reminiscences' were subsumed to an apparently 'inert' genre, the novel as a whole retains its subversive power as an analysis of the duplicitous processes of early modern capitalism. Moreover, Melville included in *Redburn* a new type of character, a person who would attack the elite's social dominance openly.

The first of these figures is a Chartist youth (successfully 'silenced' by Redburn). The Chartists were working-class men and women who in a national movement sought for political and social emancipation. Melville first acknowledges an interest in Chartism in Chapter 148 of *Mardi*, which describes their foiled 1848 march to Parliament. In *Redburn*, the man's open criticism is circumscribed by presenting him as slightly deranged:

In his hand was a soiled, inflammatory-looking pamphlet, from which he frequently read; following up the quotations with nervous appeals to his hearers, a rolling of his eyes, and sometimes the most frantic gestures. I was not long within hearing of him, before I became aware that this youth was a Chartist, (R 226)

Redburn's nonchalant final comment, however, reveals that he is fully aware of who the Chartist is, as does his enumeration of the various people in the audience: 'The people were mostly mechanics and artisans in their holiday clothes; but mixed with them were a good many soldiers, in lean, lank, and dinnerless undresses, sporting attenuated rattans' (R 226). It is the possibility of gaining the support of disaffected soldiery that leads to the breaking-up of the meeting. Hence, although Redburn has excised any of the Chartist's actual words from his 'Reminiscences', because he is aware of the man's political challenge to his class he has had to leave traces of his reaction in the narrative for the reader to uncover. Once that reader recognizes why Redburn has so suppressed the Chartist, then when he is unable to suppress another character, the revolutionary threat



that this poses is rendered all the more obvious. This threat is unleashed in Redburn's failed handling of Jackson.

Few critics have appreciated the importance in Melville's development of Jackson, one of the sailors on the Highlander; only one has grasped it entirely:

Dominating *Redburn* is the character of Jackson. Jackson is a man of passion, of spiritual force, and a man in revolt against the whole world for what it has done to him. He is the best seaman on board. Despite physical weakness he is so overpowering a personality that all the men on board are afraid of him. Without education, he is marvellously quick and cunning, and understands human nature and those he had to deal with. And finally there was his eye, 'the most deep, subtle, infernal looking eye, that I ever saw lodged in a human head',<sup>26</sup>

Here C.L.R. James recognises the first appearance of a true rebel in Melville's fiction.

The most important thing about Jackson is that he is a working-class character who eludes categorization by the narrator. Unlike the cook, steward or Blunt, he will not be turned into a stereotyped novelistic figure. Although Redburn constantly tries to portray Jackson as mad (R 71), and devilish (R 73), and describes him as 'the foul lees and dregs of a man' (R 68), the sailor always escapes him. Indeed, he constantly terrifies Redburn, and seems to have marked him out for special attention, as the narrator is aware:

And I sometimes fancied, it was the consciousness of his miserable, broken-down condition, and the prospect of soon dying like a dog, in consequence of his sins, that made this poor wretch always eye me with such malevolence as he did. For I was young and handsome, at least my mother so thought me. (R 68)

Far from Jackson being 'attracted' by Redburn's countenance, however, it is what Redburn represents that antagonises the sailor; for Jackson recognises Redburn's elitist stance, and as an oppressed worker in the capitalist system tries to fight back by forcing its reality upon Redburn. Jackson's role in *Redburn* is to be the voice of the victim.

Having been employed in all of the elite's mercantile ventures from Indian trading through to working in a Portuguese slaver, Jackson has had an unparalleled insight into the underside of capitalism:

He would tell of lying in Batavia during a fever, when his ship lost a man every few days, and how they went reeling ashore with the body, and got still more intoxicated by way of precaution against the plague ... He would talk of sailors being poisoned at Canton with drugged 'shampoo,' for the sake of their money; and of the Malay ruffians, who stopped ships in the straits of Gaspar, and always saved the captain for the last, so as to make him point out where the most valuable goods were stored, (R 67-8)

Now, ill and ageing, but still the leading seaman, he is entirely embittered at his experience, and knows that he will never receive adequate compensation for his efforts.

Thus Jackson typifies the fate of the oppressed in the nineteenth-century; but he also articulates their struggle. For instance, it is he who stands up for the crew's rights in the Liverpool lodgings (R 225), and he also tries to befriend an outcast boy, who unfortunately recoils from his embittered appearance (R 126). Nevertheless, his most characteristic struggle is to try to impress upon the people around him the reality of the situation in which they are living. Thus with the emigrants he 'set a report going among them, that Riga purposed taking them to Barbary, and selling them all for slaves' (R 285), and he also comments:

'Pigs, is it?' coughed Jackson, from his bunk, where he sat presiding over the banquet, but not partaking, like a devil who had lost his appetite by chewing sulphur. - 'Pigs is it? - and the day is close by, ye spalpeens, when you'll want to be after taking a sup at our troughs!' (R 308)

He thereby accurately reveals the emigrants' real status, and also predicts the coming famine and plague aboard the Highlander.

Yet it is Redburn who is the prime focus of Jackson's attention. When they pass a wreck in the Atlantic, he says to the young man:

'Look there,' said Jackson, hanging over the rail and coughing - 'Look there; that's a sailor's coffin. Ha! ha! Buttons,' turning round to me - 'how do you like that, Buttons? Wouldn't you like to take a sail with them 'ere dead

men? Wouldn't it be nice? And then he tried to laugh, but only coughed again. (R 116-7)

This clearly reveals Jackson's view of how he thinks sailors are treated. He also shocks Redburn by suggesting that some people stop at nothing in their desire to extort every last dollar from the system:

But what most astonished me, and seemed almost incredible, was the infernal opinion of Jackson, that the man had been actually dead when brought on board the ship; and that knowingly, and merely for the sake of the month's advance, paid into his hand upon the strength of the bill he presented, the body-snatching crimp had knowingly shipped a corpse on board of the Highlander, under the pretense of its being a live body in a drunken trance. And I heard Jackson say, that he had known of such things having been done before. (R 269)

In both of these cases, the narrator is stunned at what he hears. Nevertheless, he maintains his solidly elitist, propaganda stance. The result is that he is alienated; he calls himself and Harry 'two friendless wanderers' (R 304) among the crew, and in an image that is of huge significance for the later *Moby-Dick*, he says:

But though I kept thus quiet, and had very little to say, and well knew that my best plan was to get along peaceably with every body, and indeed endure a good deal before showing fight, yet I could not avoid Jackson's evil eye, nor escape his bitter enmity. And his being my foe, set many of the rest against me; or at least they were afraid to speak out before Jackson; so that at last I found myself a sort of Ishmael in the ship, without a single friend or companion; and I began to feel hatred growing up in me against the whole crew. (R 73)

Thus Jackson, the voice of the oppressed, in singling out Redburn, challenges the representative voice of the elite in a set-piece encounter. Taking up the role of the Typees, although in a very different context and in very different ways, Jackson threatens the masters, and refuses to submit. Because Jackson challenges him to such an extent, Redburn is forced to include him in his 'Reminiscences', and to try to suggest that he is mad. Once we have recognised that this is only another narratorial 'classification', Jackson's full significance can be seen. This is focussed especially in the account of his death, for in pushing himself to the end



and refusing to submit to his masters, Jackson accomplishes a martyr's sacrifice. Through it he compels Redburn, the elitist apologist, to record the way that his last defiant utterance issues in a stain of blood on a canvas sail, unassimilable by any treacherous words on a page:

'Haul out to windward!' coughed Jackson, with a blasphemous cry, and he threw himself back with a violent strain upon the bridle in his hand. But the wild words were hardly out of his mouth, when his hands dropped to his side, and the bellying sail was spattered with a torrent of blood from his lungs.

As the man next him stretched out his arm to save, Jackson fell headlong from the yard, and with a long seethe, plunged like a diver into the sea.

It was when the ship had rolled to windward, which, with the long projection of the yard-arm over the side, made him strike far out upon the water. His fall was seen by the whole upward-gazing crowd on deck, some of whom were spotted with the blood that trickled from the sail, while they raised a spontaneous cry, so shrill and wild, that a blind man might have known something deadly had happened. (P 321-2)

#### ix) Afterword

In *Redburn* then, despite the fact that much of the novel was (and has been) neutered by critics, readers, and commentators, we see Melville maintaining *Mardi's* more overt stance. He includes in the novel dissentient voices that recall the Typees, but that are more 'probable' in their open denunciation than Taji's companions. These are the handful of sailors, pre-eminently Jackson, who are those members of the Highlander's crew that escape Redburn's situation. Avoiding his sea-novel stereotypes, they become the representatives of all workers, everywhere, who are exploited by capitalism. It is in them that conditions in Liverpool and aboard the world's merchant ships are challenged; Redburn's apparent criticism is mere elitist ventriloquism - it is designed only to suggest outrage, so that the disguising platitudes can be merrily advanced. While Redburn says during the fever epidemic 'the first cry of one of these

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infants, was almost simultaneous with the splash of its father's body in the sea. Thus we come and we go' (R 315), Jackson fixes this situation with his glittering eye and 'scoffs and jeers' (R 270). No wonder Redburn says of him: 'he froze my blood, and made my soul stand still' (R 270).

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# ***WHITE-JACKET***

**'a great believer in the rights  
of Americans'**

**Alfred Kazin**



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*White-Jacket*

Like Redburn's 'Reminiscences', White-Jacket's narrative is a literary construct, designed with the same political purpose as his predecessor's; the promotion of the conservative status-quo that was favourable to the contemporary elite whom White-Jacket represents. As with Redburn's narrative, White-Jacket's memoirs are thus distinguishable from Melville's text, *White-Jacket*.

### 1) The Purpose of White-Jacket's Narrative

White-Jacket 'writes in' his audience from the very first pages of his narrative:

It was nothing more than a white duck frock, or rather shirt; which, laying on deck, I folded double at the bosom, and by then making a continuation of the slit there, opened it lengthwise - much as you would cut a leaf in the last new novel, (*W-J* 351)

The second person is not accidental here; it establishes a direct relationship with the reader that the narrator maintains throughout:

Let us forget the scourge and the gangway a while, and jot down in our memories a few little things pertaining to our man-of-war world ... There is no part of a frigate where you will see more going and coming of strangers ... than in the immediate vicinity of the scuttle-butt, (*W-J* 647)

As the U.S.S. *Neversink* proceeds on its journey home and as White-Jacket discourses about events on the way (this is the substance of the story), the juxtaposition of pronouns slowly draws the reader into the construction of the narrative, intending to turn one into a complicit co-creator. This operation is highly organised by the aware narrator; it is not 'naive' rehearsal:

Thus, borne through my task toward the end, my own soul now sinks at what I myself have portrayed. But let us forget past chapters, if we may, while we

paint less repugnant things, (W-J 755)

Consequently, if the reader chooses to resist this manipulation, the function of the tags that demonstrate the narrator's project will soon be appreciable, and the exposure of White-Jacket's political intentions will have been begun.

Throughout his narrative, White-Jacket analogises the warship on which he serves with the world at large. This comparison is stated explicitly when he says 'we rolled and rolled on our way, like the world in its orbit' (W-J 468); but it is implicit in many comments. The trope is repeated when, for example, he compares the ship with a city (W-J 459), suggests that life on the Neversink is like life in Broadway (W-J 470), or repeats an analogy between the ship and Noah's ark, which 'literally' contained all creation: (W-J 454) and (W-J 507). In her essay 'White-Jacket: Melville and the Man-of-War Microcosm', Priscilla Allen demonstrates that this comparison was exploited by many contemporary authors.' This indicates that White-Jacket's narrative is honest to its historical context, and thus that as narrator he is a truly representative figure.

More importantly, however, Allen reveals the extent to which the ship/world image 'served more than a decorative purpose', being exploited politically by the various authors. Hence E.C.Wines's *Two Years and a Half in the Navy* according to Allen: 'although appearing to be a sane, objective account, exhibits a biased selection and suppression of data' (Allen, pp.32, 36) - a suppression that accords with Wines' officer status. This is also true of White-Jacket, for when in the final chapters of his narrative 'our man-of-war world' (W-J 543) is used as the stage for overt political proclamation, the analogy of the *Neversink* and the world assures that

White-Jacket's comments are universally significant, not just applicable to life at sea.

The image itself is thus politically loaded, and is used by White-Jacket to advance arguments such as this:

As a man-of-war world that sails though the sea, so this earth that sails through the air. We mortals are all on board a fast-sailing, never-sinking world-frigate, of which God was the shipwright; and she is but one craft in a Milky-Way fleet, of which God is the Lord High Admiral. The port we sail from is forever astern. And though far out of sight of land, our last destination remains a secret to ourselves and our officers; yet our final haven was predestinated ere we slipped from the stocks at Creation. (W-J 768)

This statement recalls the similarly bland, all-encompassing comments that Redburn makes when in Liverpool and about the emigrants. Both suggest that there can be no political will to reform or change the world. White-Jacket attributes this situation to the desires of an external deity, but as we have seen, it actually accords more closely with the social advantage of the contemporary elite. Indeed, in utilising this predestinarian rhetoric, White-Jacket closely allies himself with the many voices that used similar language to describe the role that they felt the U.S.A must 'inevitably' take on the world stage:

[The American claim] is by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federative self-government entrusted to us. It is a right such as that of the tree to the space of air and earth suitable for the full expansion of its principle and destiny of growth.<sup>2</sup>

Here John O'Sullivan similarly arrogates to himself the right to 'speak for' all people, and in doing so obliterates discussion and dissent by invoking ['manifest'] destiny. As Frederick Merk comments, this concept, especially when expressed in the form 'mission', characteristically engages those Americans who are loyal to 'the enduring values of American civilization' (Merk, p.261), and encourages them to 'animate' their fellows to similar



loyalty. It is precisely such animation that White-Jacket is attempting here.

It is thus no surprise when he next says:

Oh, shipmates and world-mates, all round! we the people suffer many abuses. Our gun-deck is full of complaints. In vain from Lieutenants do we appeal to the Captain; in vain - while on board our world-frigate - to the indefinite Navy Commissioners, so far out of sight aloft. Yet the worst of our evils we blindly inflict upon ourselves; our officers can not remove them, even if they would. (W-J 769 my emphasis)

Here action is again disparaged, and more importantly, abuses and injustices are said to be 'we the people's' fault; White-Jacket claims to speak as one of the people, and uses this position to lecture them about their own culpability. Indeed, he even suggests that any attempt at change is virtually seditious: 'For the rest, whatever befall us, let us never train our murderous guns inboard; let us not mutiny with bloody pikes in our hands' (W-J 769). This is to outlaw any form of action such as strike, riot, or public protest. What must instead be done is to wait dutifully for the final conflagration:

Our Lord High Admiral will yet interpose; and though long ages should elapse, and leave our wrongs unredressed, yet, shipmates and world-mates! let us never forget, that,

Whoever afflict us, whatever surround,  
Life is a voyage that's homeward-bound!

(W-J 770)

In this concluding statement, elevated rhetoric and a trite hymnic couplet replace reformist commitment and attempt to disguise the deeply political sentiments; struggle to transform society of any kind is neatly kicked over the horizon. But, as with Redburn, poetic effusion does not hide politics, however it may seem to - it is actually a strategic vehicle.

White-Jacket's comments must be read with the knowledge that this kind of argument was typical in the mid-nineteenth-century U.S. context.

The invocation of the demands of deity, or of the national mission, or of the Union or Constitution all became more insistent as the U.S. state itself was increasingly stressed. While at one level 'Manifest Destiny' articulated what was felt to be the republic's inalienable right to the moral leadership of the continent, and hence to its land, the resultant expansion also generated debates about the status of the new territories. Should these be slave or free? In the successive deals that were struck between the representatives of the various sections, culminating in the 1850 Compromise, which partitioned the new territory as far as the Pacific between bond and free along the 36°30' line of the previous 1820 settlement, the fundamental alliance of interest that had always characterised the nation-wide elite was still operating, although it was now heavily strained.

By attending to the increasingly strident rhetoric of mission or Union, modern commentators can discern this political struggle. For instance, Daniel Webster, a proponent of Union proclaimed:

The question is, whether we have the true patriotism, the true Americanism, necessary to carry us through such a trial. The whole world is looking towards us with extreme anxiety. For myself, I propose, Sir, to abide by the principles and the purposes which I have avowed. I shall stand by the Union, and by all who stand by it. I shall do justice to the whole country, according to the best of my ability, in all I say, and act for the good of the whole country in all I do. I mean to stand upon the Constitution. I need no other platform. I shall know but one country. The ends I aim at shall be my country's, my God's, and Truth's. I was born an American; I will live an American; I shall die an American; and I intend to perform the duties incumbent upon me in that character to the end of my career.<sup>2</sup>

His conservative motivation is here plain to see.

Even arch-abolitionists such as Harriet Beecher-Stowe used language that seemed to place almost greater priority on the concept of the Union than on concrete human rights:

A day of grace is yet held out to us. Both North and South have been guilty before God; and the *Christian church* has a heavy account to answer. Not by

combining together, to protect injustice and cruelty, and making a common capital of sin, is this Union to be saved, - but by repentance, justice and mercy; for, not surer is the eternal law by which the millstone sinks in the ocean, than that stronger law, by which injustice and cruelty shall bring on nations the wrath of Almighty God!<sup>4</sup>

What united these figures was the wish to prolong the U.S. polity that they and their forbears had established. While one supported the harsh 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, with its demand to return all runaways, and the other wanted an end to slavery, both were also motivated by class loyalty. Neither envisaged a 'new' Union, in which there would be genuine social equality. They each demonstrate this point by the language that they use.

Because White-Jacket's rhetoric coheres precisely with theirs, his narrative also becomes the covert vehicle of typical elitist sentiment. A thorough American patriot, he announces that 'the political Messiah ... has come in us' (W-J 506). In the now familiar way, he thus claims that any further change is unnecessary; the U.S. already embodies social perfection. What is necessary, White-Jacket pleads, is to preserve this perfection, and to vivify the 'idea of America' as it has already been expounded. White-Jacket's narrative, then, participates more than 'rhetorically' in this conservative project - it is itself structured to further the elite's fight to retain its control. In entertaining his audience, as we shall see, White-Jacket parades the image of reform, but in so doing seeks to neutralise the will to reform. His project is to circumscribe dissent by according it lip-service. This is also an historically representative tactic; as Howard Zinn shows, however many Northerners spoke in support of Southern slaves in the years before 1861, war was only declared: 'under conditions controlled by whites, and only when required by the political and economic needs of the business elite of the North' - the speeches had contained conflict until the dominant class as a whole had resolved to



move.<sup>5</sup>

As narrator, White-Jacket thus works to promote the cause of the class that he represents in the text. In the face of growing tension, he replaces reformist commitment with comments such as this: 'but we are all Fatalists at bottom' (W-J 482). Ostensibly a bland statement, this is actually deeply political, for we are manifestly not all social fatalists at bottom, and neither were the millions of marginalised people in the nineteenth-century U.S.A. On the contrary, they were only being told that they were fatalists by spokesmen such as White-Jacket. This point will become clearer as we analyse how White-Jacket used his narrative as a political ploy. Yet it is immediately clear once we accept just how many heterodox voices there were in the mid-nineteenth-century, and how they were excluded from contributing to the debate. Not only were there Fourierite and Owenite attempts to reform U.S. society, there were also the much more radical projects of genuinely working-class people. I included a quotation from one of the 'alternative' declarations of independence in the Introduction, but another working-class comment illustrates very well the point that in contrast, White-Jacket's mediatory voice is inherently class-bound. This is a plea for education:

But last, though not least, [we] view with an inflexible determination, the rich and wealthy, the bigoted and prejudiced, and the whole of the non-productive classes of society, who oppose a System of Education that would give to the children of the poor, equal benefits as those possessed by the rich, These are the enemies we have to contend with.<sup>6</sup>

## ii) White-Jacket's Narrative; Reformist?

While I have suggested that White-Jacket was governed by profoundly conservative principles, the consensus among modern critics is that his narrative was radically reformist. C.R.Anderson calls it 'a novel of purpose, in which plot has been supplanted by a sustained attack on naval abuses', and Alfred Kazin says that it: 'bitterly denounces the harsh usage and frequent punishment of sailors and never wearies in ... denunciation of military justice'.<sup>7</sup> Most proponents of this view centre their arguments on the chapters which deal with flogging; but are these chapters what they seem to be?

It is the nature of White-Jacket's opposition to flogging, rather than his opposition itself, that is of key importance. In Chapter 34, he lists 'some of the evil effects of flogging'. Far from these being the dehumanising ones that we may expect, a prime 'evil' is apparently the fact that the British flog less than the Americans:

It is singular that while the Lieutenants of the Watch in American men-of-war so long usurped the power of inflicting corporal punishment with the *colt*, few or no similar abuses were known in the English Navy. And though the captain of an English armed ship is authorized to inflict, at his own discretion, *more* than a dozen lashes (I think three dozen), yet it is to be doubted whether, upon the whole, there is as much flogging at present in the English Navy as in the American. (W-J 495)

Consequently, flogging is turned into a matter of national honour, not principle:

Captains in the navy, to a certain extent, inflict the scourge - which is ever at hand - for nearly all degrees of transgression ... It is of a piece with the penal laws that prevailed in England some sixty years ago, when one hundred and sixty different offences were declared by the statute-book to be capital, and the servant-maid who but pilfered a watch was hung beside the murderer of a family. (W-J 493)

White-Jacket here allies penal reform with patriotism, and so prepares us for this statement:

The chivalric Virginian, John Randolph of Roanoke, declared, in his place in Congress, that on board of the American man-of-war that carried him out Ambassador [sic.] to Russia he had witnessed more flogging than had taken place on his own plantation of five hundred African slaves in ten years ... It is a thing that American men-of-war's-men have often observed, that the Lieutenants from the Southern States, the descendents of the old Virginians, are much less severe, and much more gentle and gentlenanly in command, than the Northern officers, as a class. (W-J 495)

Thus he suggests that the situation of American sailors is worse than that of slaves, but he does not call for an end to all flogging, whether at sea or on land. The slaves are a polemical tool; the outrage is that white crewmen should be treated like Africans. White-Jacket, moreover, implies his admiration for the 'gentlemen' of the U.S. In other words, in his supposed calls for reform, White-Jacket does not so much propose change as stoke elitist American opinion, and so reinforce the narrator/audience bond.

This can also be seen when he associates the flogging issue with naval temperance:

But there are some sober seamen that would much rather draw the money for it, instead of the grog itself, as provided by law; but they are too often deterred from this by the thought of receiving a scourging for some inconsiderable offence, as a substitute for the stopping of their spirits. This is a most serious obstacle to the cause of temperance in the Navy. (W-J 493-4)

Here flogging as an evil is subordinated to the desire to promote elitist attitudes towards drink (and hence elitist control strategies), so again providing a useful soap-box for White-Jacket. He ironically allies himself at this point with temperance figures such as Captain C.Rockwell, as opposed to the normal sailors.<sup>20</sup> Enthusiasm for his call must therefore be moderated by doubts as to both his motives, and the reality of his commitment to change:

Join hands with me, then; and, in the name of that Being in whose image the flogged sailor is made, let us demand of Legislators, by what right they dare profane what God himself counts sacred. (W-J 496)

So he may urge, but once he has made his flourish, do we feel that he



would then be concerned enough to transform his words into actions, or are his words themselves his actions; actions designed to inhibit change?

Chapter 35, 'flogging not lawful', reinforces such a sceptical analysis. It is based on the statement:

If there are any three things opposed to the genius of the American Constitution, they are these: irresponsibility in a judge, unlimited discretionary authority in an executive, and the union of an irresponsible judge and an unlimited executive in one person, (W-J 497)

White-Jacket claims that ironically this is precisely what does occur in the U.S. navy, and because of this inconsistency, he argues that flogging should be abolished.

Nevertheless, he again seems to say more than he actually does, for while it is clear that those are the premises of the American Constitution, it is just as clear that that document was both unable and unwilling to address itself to real discrimination and injustice. In fact, as we have seen, it was the expression of the aspirations of the white, male, elite, and was designed to ensure their hegemony. Therefore, White-Jacket can say that the naval code 'should not convert into slaves some of the citizens of a nation of free men' (W-J 498), but he cannot champion the U.S. as in any sense an equitable society. In fact, he does not do this. As the quotation above shows, he is concerned only with white sailors; as he also says: 'our institutions claim to be based upon broad principles of liberty and equality' (W-J 498 my emphasis). White-Jacket is quite aware that both the Constitution, and his invocation of it, are selective in their scope, a point which undercuts the flourish with which he concludes the chapter: 'in a word, we denounce [slavery] as religiously, morally, and immutably *wrong*' (W-J 500). When White-Jacket speaks of discrimination against 'an American-born citizen, whose grandsire may have ennobled him

by pouring out his blood at Bunker Hill' (W-J 500), it is clearly only such a citizen with whom he is concerned, not a black, or an American-Indian.

Indeed, it is White-Jacket's judiciousness for the Constitution that marks him out as elitist, just as much as his distinctive rhetoric or self-aware narrative shaping. Moreover, his remarks about the Constitution alert the reader to another significant feature of his narration. One of White-Jacket's consistent arguments is that American sailors deserve the right to be treated as members of the American republic that they serve - this should not just be accorded to the officers (W-J 499). Yet, because he closely links the ship and the shore in his world/ship analogy, and in the fact that he is the floating representative of a shore-bound social class, White-Jacket also tends to collapse the division, and so ironically to undercut his 'plea' for sailors. It is important to become attuned to this contradictory aspect of White-Jacket's stance.

When, finally, in Chapter 36, White-Jacket apparently produces an argument from necessity - that as Admiral Collingwood could control a ship without flogging, so should American captains - we know that he is not ultimately interested in what he terms the 'eternal principle' of abolitionism (W-J 502). Each of these three chapters is designed not to promote actual change, but to be an impressive show of argument in favour of change. White-Jacket's intentions are conservative: 'certainly, the necessities of navies warrant a code for its government more stringent than the law which governs the land' (W-J 498). It is far more important for him to speak well, and to catch the mood of his readers, than for his words actually to alter physical conditions. His climax is a rhetorical display that will ensure, whether flogging is abolished or not, that people

such as White-Jacket, and the class he represents will retain political control:

The Past is, in many things, the foe of mankind; the Future is, in all things, our friend. In the Past is no hope; the Future is both hope and fruition. But in many things we Americans are driven to a rejection of the maxims of the Past, seeing that, ere long, the van of the nations must, of right, belong to ourselves. There are occasions when it is for America to make precedents, and not to obey them. (W-J 108)

With their concern for temperance, Constitutionalism, 'principle' and nationalism, these chapters are designed to chime with the elitist audience. In eliciting agreement by expressing shared sentiments, White-Jacket both neutralises any chance of dissent and makes the reading experience truly 'entertaining'. There is (apparently) nothing more pleasant than being told that one's own values are truly democratic when reading a novel in the comfort of one's home; especially when those values are laced with a dose of nationalism:

And we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people - the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. Seventy years ago we escaped from thrall, and, besides our first birth-right - embracing one continent of earth - God has given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans. (W-J 506)

White-Jacket's rhetoric is here typical of the syncretistic language that I argued in the Introduction characterised elitist orators such as Daniel Webster. When listening to him one must always remember the elitist view that rhetoric was a method of persuasion. If White-Jacket is allowed to include 'all' Americans in such a sweeping paean, he will again have undercut the possibility of dissent.

Yet, most modern commentators have insisted that White-Jacket was totally committed to reform. One, Rogin, even proposes an analogy between the flogging of sailors and the flogging of slaves that suggests White-



Jacket was a manumitter as well.<sup>9</sup> This is to overlook the clear intentions of the narrative. White-Jacket as narrator manages to propose a highly effective rhetorical display, that has frequently been found attractive by readers, not a reformist manifesto. In doing this, he was typical of his time. As G.S. Smith shows, the mid-nineteenth-century U.S. navy was subject to exactly the same political movements as society ashore. When Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft sought to reform its structures in the late 1840s, he sought to do so in accordance with universal Democratic principles. Hence, the introduction of merit exams to secure promotion - a seeming advance - was balanced by the foundation of a Naval Academy at Annapolis. This institution ensured that the minority of entrants who were not elitist by birth would be so in affiliation by the time that they left. While the impression of change is evident, the underlying status quo is maintained, just as it is in White-Jacket's narration. Indeed, White-Jacket, like Bancroft, so successfully 'voices' reform as to make its actual implementation much more difficult. He produces a narrative structure that inhibits progress. Smith's demonstration that the U.S. maritime society exhibited the same tensions as its shore-bound partner reinforces the validity of both White-Jacket's ship/world analogy and the fact that his ostensibly 'naval' story has a much wider political purpose.<sup>10</sup>

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111) Class

It is, however, not only White-Jacket's Manifest Destiny nationalism or his rhetorical reformism, that indicate his elitist status, and his narrative's function to promote that elitism, but also his attitude to class. It is not new to argue this - it is a tenet of Allen's article - but critics have perhaps misunderstood White-Jacket's position. As our view of his 'democratic' credentials should now already be tarnished, we may be able to appreciate the distinction between Melville's and White-Jacket's very different perspectives. In doing this it will be seen that White-Jacket's voice again tends to hide its own political motivation. We must attune ourselves to the nature of the social 'hierarchy' as he presents it, and to his position within it.

Because of the world/ship analogy, White-Jacket's analysis of life on the Neversink is also his analysis of life in the contemporary U.S.; a fact that is reinforced by his comparisons of the Constitution and the Articles of War. Thus those aspects of life afloat which White-Jacket commends, must also be those which he feels are desirable for society in general. What is it, precisely, that he does commend?

Essentially, White-Jacket envisages a class-based society, with himself as a member of the leisured elite. His approach is certainly class-specific. Chapter 6, 'officers and underlings', for instance, analyses the crew thus:

Some account has been given of the various divisions into which our crew was divided; so it may be well to say something of the officers; who they are, and what are their functions. (W-J 368)

White-Jacket's anatomy reveals the pervasiveness of the class system, which governs every aspect of life:

Next in order come the Warrant or Forward officers, consisting of the Boatswain, Gunner, Carpenter, and Sail-maker. Though these worthies sport long coats and wear the anchor-button; yet, in the estimation of the ward-room officers, they are not, technically speaking, rated gentlemen. The First Lieutenant, Chaplain, or Surgeon, for example, would never dream of inviting them to dinner. (W-J 373)

His discussion is penetrating, and he does not shy from explicit terminology: 'the cooking for these two classes is done at a distant part of the great galley' (W-J 376). When placed in the context of the ship/world parallel, this means that he sees the world itself as class-structured:

Glance fore and aft along our flush decks. What a swarming crew! All told, they muster hard upon eight hundred millions of souls. Over these we have authoritative Lieutenants, a sword-belted Officer of Marines, a Chaplain, a Professor, a Purser, a Doctor, a Cook, a Master-at-arms. We have a *brig* for trespassers; a bar by our main-mast, at which they are arraigned; a cat-o'-nine-tails and a gangway, to degrade them in their own eyes and in ours. These are not always employed to convert Sin to Virtue, but to divide them, and protect Virtue and legalized Sin from unlegalized Vice. (W-J 769)

Here White-Jacket happily speaks in a conservative fashion about the existence of and the necessity for social divisions that govern prospects, possessions, behaviour and laws. In no way does he propose a struggle to change this system. Indeed, this is the social vision that he promotes, by openly commending his own class, the elite.

It is perhaps here that previous commentators have mistaken White-Jacket's sentiments, for in his caricatures of officers, in addition to common sailors, he may at first seem to be advancing a balanced, non-biassed view. While he lurkingly admires the way that the Southern 'gentlemen' administer punishment, the narrator also lambasts the affectation which he suggests characterises the officer class, exposing the



captain's drunkenness, the midshipmen's arrogance, and, in the case of Selvagee, a senior Lieutenant's ineffectiveness:

In plain prose, Selvagee was one of those officers whom the sight of a trim-fitting naval coat had captivated in the days of his youth. He fancied, that if a sea-officer dressed well, and conversed genteelly, he would abundantly uphold the honor of his flag, and immortalize the tailor that made him. (W-J 381)

The significant aspect of this statement is that White-Jacket obviously feels both the uniform and the flag are symbols that should be upheld; there is a partisan moralism here that must be recognized. Such a moralistic attitude underpinned the nineteenth-century U.S. debates about social status.

White-Jacket's analysis, then, participates in the contemporary argument. As characterised by Marvin Meyers, the battle which was begun by Andrew Jackson, and which was still raging in the late 1840s, was between: 'equality against privilege, liberty against domination; honest work against idle exploit; natural dignity against factitious superiority; patriotic conservatism against alien innovation; progress against precedent'. Moreover, the central evil was seen to be the National Bank, which became the symbol for all things 'aristocratic'. It was proposed that there was a genuine republican morality and either an alien aristocracy or a bestial mob, both of whom refused to accord with the 'true' American values.' This is, again, the 'idea of America': conform to the values of the 'idea' or be castigated. And as we have seen, those values derived from the attitudes of the dominant elite, who were always hiding their hegemony by attacking 'the other'. In White-Jacket's narrative it is the main-top, and its parallel mess, the 'Forty-Two Pounder Club' - to both of which White-Jacket belongs - that are said to be the guardians of the true morality of the ship.

In contrast to both the commoners and the officers, for instance, when on shore leave the main-topmen apparently behave in a cultured and well-ordered fashion:

With Jack Chase and a few other discreet and gentlemanly top-men, I went ashore on the first day, with the first quarter-watch. Our own little party had a charming time; we saw many fine sights; fell in - as all sailors must - with dashing adventures, (W-J 585)

They accept certain norms of behaviour, expect others to accord to them, and when they don't, they organise little tricks by which they enforce them, as when they victimise the hapless Tubbs, who had the misfortune of previously having been a whaler:

Jack's courteous manner, however, very soon relieved his embarrassment; but it is no use to be courteous to *some* men in this world. Tubbs belonged to that category. No sooner did the bumpkin feel himself at ease, than he lunched [sic] out, as usual, into tremendous laudations of whalemén; declaring that whalemén alone deserved the name of sailors. Jack stood it some time; but when Tubbs came down upon men-of-war, and particularly upon main-top-men, his sense of propriety was so outraged, that he lunched into Tubbs like a forty-two pounder, (W-J 363)

Thus they maintain a genteel, 'civilised' society, inviting sailors to the top to tell patriotic yarns (W-J 676), passing the time in conversation, or listening to Jack Chase's poetry recitals (W-J 767). Among their number, they count both White-Jacket the narrative-craftsman, and Lemsford, a poet. From their top, they even have musical soirees:

Nor, at times, was the sound of music wanting, to augment the poetry of the scene. The whole band would be assembled on the poop, regaling the officers, and incidentally ourselves, with their fine old airs. To these, some of us would occasionally dance in the *top*, which was almost as large as an ordinary-sized parlor. When the instrumental melody of the band was not to be had, our nightingales mustered their voices, and gave us a song, (W-J 677)

Labour is apparently marginalised in the main-top, and life is resolved into leisure, but at all times it is implied that the moral standard is different from either that on the quarter-deck or in the forecastle. Terms such as 'courtesy' or 'propriety' indicate that White-Jacket upholds

the main-top as morally exemplary.

White-Jacket's view of class-politics aboard the *Neversink* is surely the same as the social elite's ashore. Therefore, as with his attitudes to flogging, in his description of life in the top, he proposes both a system of values and a set of occupations which mimic exactly those which were held by his readers. Again, this seeks to make the reading experience into a pleasant confirmation of the already known. For a nineteenth-century elitist to acquiesce in White-Jacket's narrative is for that person to consume a confection of 'self-evident' attitudes, served up by their representative figure in the text. Certainly, White-Jacket is class-specific, but at no point in his narrative does he either envisage or commend class-struggle in the cause of justice. On the contrary, he sanguinely accepts the most spurious of all divisions:

'Blast them, Jack, what they call the public is a monster, like the idol we saw in Owhyhee, with the head of a jackass, the body of a baboon, and the tail of a scorpion!'

'I don't like that,' said Jack; 'When I'm ashore, I myself am part of the public.'

'Your pardon, Jack; you are not. You are then a part of the people, just as you are aboard the frigate here. The public is one thing, Jack, and the people another.'

'You are right,' said Jack; 'right as this leg. Virgil, you are a trump; you are a jewel, my boy. The public and the people! Ay, ay, my lads, let us hate the one and cleave to the other.' (W-J 549)

Here White-Jacket relates the supposed distinction between 'people' - a political entity with whom one must publicly claim solidarity, and 'public' - the uneducated masses. In doing so, he proposes that genuine social sympathy is impossible (for we are not all equal), but that rhetorical sympathy is necessary, as a political ploy to retain power.

Indeed, White-Jacket is in his analysis again being the true representative of his class, for as Smith remarks, the Navy was fully involved in the wider contemporary debate about status: 'The bitterness



engendered by the question of assimilated rank indicated that naval personnel were not unlike most Americans in an era when the welfare and advancement of the common man was - at least rhetorically - a national article of faith' (Smith, p.85). Hence, by adumbrating his distinctive view (and because of the ship/world metaphor), White-Jacket proposes a particular stance within this general discussion. His narrative, with its envisaged wide readership, is in essence a political tract, designed for the national stage.

Yet are these implied values also Melville's? Previous analysis in the thesis argues that they are not. Melville would surely have repudiated White-Jacket's acceptance of such a request as this, levied in the interests of class solidarity by the main-top's behavioural watch-dog Jack Chase:

He made us all wear our hats at a particular angle - instructed us in the tie of our neck handkerchiefs; and protested against our wearing vulgar *dungaree* trousers; besides giving us lessons in seamanship; and solemnly conjuring us, forever to eschew the company of any sailor we suspected of having served in a whaler, (W-J 362)

There is in White-Jacket's narration a continual hint of self-satisfaction that ironically promotes his self-betrayal:

We had rare times in that top. We accounted ourselves the best seamen in the ship; and from our airy perch, literally looked down upon the landlopers below, sneaking about the deck, among the guns, (W-J 362)

His comment that Chase was 'a little bit of a dictator' (W-J 362) is a coquettish remark intended to disguise what is, in fact, his own moral weakness, and also his imperfect control of his own narrative. For there are evidences of the way that White-Jacket constructs his narrative as a vehicle, with which to propose his elitist conservatism. In highlighting this construction, the flaws in it, and its unincorporated voices, it is

possible to discern the distance in attitudes between the narrator and author.

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#### iv) White-Jacket's Narrative; Strategic Genre Use

White-Jacket says that his narrative is governed by this rationale:

I am now enabled to give such a free, broad, off-hand, bird's-eye, and, more than all, impartial account of our man-of-war world; withholding nothing; inventing nothing; nor flattering, nor scandalizing any; but meting out to all - commodore and messenger-boy alike - their precise descriptions and deserts.  
(W-J 397)

He thus claims a disinterestedness which is belied by the analysis above. And he also suggests that he 'simply' records 'facts'. Close consideration of his narrative reveals that this is another misleading suggestion. Like his predecessors, he actually presents opinion and novelistic detail as fact, using genre characteristics as a means to secure his constituency.

White-Jacket chooses to employ the sea story as his 'host' genre, using it to inspire both small details and large incidents in his relation. As we have seen in the chapter on *Redburn*, stories such as *Peter Simple*, and narratives such as Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* were currently very popular. I have included a table of common features of such stories in the Appendices, as I did with travel/missionary narratives, in order to understand White-Jacket's narrative fully. I shall also make some general remarks here.<sup>12</sup>

The sheer popularity of this genre must be stressed. In Britain, the naval romps of Captain Maryatt, or the still famous Smollett, reminded

the audience of Nelson, Trafalgar, and the age of undisputed naval supremacy that they ushered in. In the U.S., Cooper's *The Red Rover* (1827) and J.C.Hart's *Miriam Coffin* (1834) recalled naval exploits during the Revolutionary War. In both nations, moreover, the swaggering sailors of such tales were complemented by stories with commercial heroes at their centre, such as Cooper's *Afloat and Ashore* (1844); and there were also, of course, the many 'truthful' diary style records of voyages. In this area, Dana predominates, but Nathaniel Ames' *Mariner's Sketches* (1830) was also widely known, and there were many others, mainly American, for instance, Samuel Leech's *Thirty Years from Home* (1843).

In their different degrees, these works offered a mix of nationalism, high adventure, and realism 'from life' that was highly attractive to the audience. The sea gave them a common setting, and the voyage rhythm established a conventional shape to the genre: embarkation, acclimatisation, the voyage out, description of the ship and its life, description of the sailors, events during the voyage, the return journey, and homecoming. This pattern, which has been a determining one in fiction ever since Homer's *Odyssey*, and is still highly attractive (consider William Golding's trilogy *Rites of Passage* 1980, *Close Quarters* 1987, and *Fire Down Below* 1989), is perhaps powerful because it provides the author with both a ready-made community for observation and an established shape to events. This means that the genre is highly suitable for novels of initiation, which is how *Redburn* has been assimilated to it via works such as *Peter Simple*.

It also means, however, that the genre is in many respects fundamentally conservative. Because the typical structure of the voyage is so rigid (a ritual in itself), the stories tend to achieve a narrative



closure that circumscribes any criticism they may seemingly have made of established ideas and practices. By this, I mean that the pervasive rhythm of departure and return neutralises all insights into the under-side of international commerce or naval institutions. Nowhere in Cooper's sea fiction does he anatomise the structures of contemporary society as pungently as he does in his *The American Democrat* (1838). After analysis, it becomes clear that it is rare for any of these authors to adopt an oppositional political stance in these works; the mould of the voyage tends to prevent this, and the subjects for description - the navy and commerce - are essentially tools for preserving and extending the power of the dominant social classes. It is thus not at all coincidental that sea stories should have become so popular during the years when the American Republic was developing itself as a world political and economic power.

So for White-Jacket to choose the sea story inevitably entails that his work will be deeply conservative. Although he claims to present an 'impartial account', in doing so he is echoing Dana's 'accurate and authentic narrative', which as we saw above is deeply elitist in allegiance, and is hardly, as he claims, 'the life of a common sailor at sea as it really is' (Dana pp.vii-viii). Descriptions of the ship, rhapsodies about the beauty of the ocean, and comments on the conventional cast of characters aboard the *Neversink* are all registers through which White-Jacket can key in to his chosen genre.

Yet, as in the books to which his bears homage, these features all serve <sup>to</sup> establish the narrator's elitism. Now this has been recognised, I hope in this section to reveal the genre manipulation that furthers White-Jacket's political intention, by considering in some detail how he exploits

his sources. It will be seen that some of the works that he uses, when reconsidered, resist the shaping effects of his pen.

It is to the naval story of Tobias Smollett that White-Jacket's narrative first seems most similar. Smollett's *Roderick Random* (1748) harks back to the world of the British navy and its tars, and, like Maryatt's, is almost eighteenth-century in feeling. A good American parallel is J.S.Sleeper's *Tales of the Ocean* (1842). These books derive their distinctiveness from the sheer simplicity of their characters and plot. As described by the dominant voice in the text, the sailors are no more than quasi-allegorical figures, whose actions are usually signified by their graphic names: Captain Oakum, Lieutenant Bowling, Jack Rattling.<sup>12</sup> White-Jacket, in consequence, calls his captain 'Claret', his commodore's secretary 'Dashman', one of his midshipmen 'Pert', a marine officer 'Colbrook', an informer 'Scriggs', the gunner's mate 'Priming', and various doctors 'Cuticle', 'Bandage', 'Sawyer', 'Wedge', and 'Patella'. As these are hardly typical of contemporary names, White-Jacket is clearly using them to associate his narrative with the popular fictional genre.

Yet in addition to general ambience, White-Jacket reworks actual characters and incidents from earlier books. For example, consider his description of an operation in Chapters 61-63, which exploits the figure of Dr.Mackshane in Chapters 27-29 of *Roderick Random*. White-Jacket's Surgeon of the Fleet, Cadwallader Cuticle announces:

'From this, I am convinced that the ball has shattered and deadened the bone, and now lies impacted in the medullary canal. In fact, there can be no doubt but that the wound is incurable, and that amputation is the only resource.'  
(W-J 614)

This closely echoes Mackshane:

He examined the fracture and the wound, and concluding, from a livid colour extending itself upon the limb, that a mortification would ensue, resolved to amputate the leg immediately. (Smollett, p.166)

Although the operation is avoided in *Roderick Random*, and horribly performed in White-Jacket's relation, the terrifying Mackshane is reincarnated for the audience.

Is there not, however, a sense of relish in White-Jacket's ghoulish description, which while in keeping with Mackshane (who is no more than a stage-play villain) is discordant in the context of White-Jacket's supposedly factual portrayal of life at sea?

These articles being removed, he snatched off his wig, placing it on the gun-deck capstan; then took out his set of false teeth, and placed it by the side of the wig; and, lastly, putting his forefinger to the inner angle of his blind eye, spirited out the glass optic with professional dexterity, and deposited that, also, next to the wig and false teeth.

Thus divested of nearly all inorganic appurtenances, what was left of the Surgeon slightly shook itself, to see whether any thing more could be spared to advantage. (W-J 620)

Perhaps the spirit of Mackshane and the thrill that he provided for his original audience is so present here that it lures White-Jacket into revealing that he also writes for the 'entertainment' of his audience.

A sensitive reader will view with similar suspicion another chapter for which there seems to have been a direct source. When White-Jacket is 'arraigned at the mast', he uses the incident to declaim against flogging:

I can not analyze my heart, though it then stood still within me. But the thing that swayed me to my purpose was not altogether the thought that Captain Claret was about to degrade me, and that I had taken an oath with my soul that he should not. No, I felt my man's manhood so bottomless within me, that no word, no blow, no scourge of Captain Claret could cut deep enough for that. I but swung to an instinct in me - the instinct diffused through all animated nature, the same that prompts even a worm to turn under the heel. (W-J 644)

But we have already seen that White-Jacket's fitful rhetorical style is usually used to conceal his deeper purposes. While its deployment here captures the passion of the original (William Leggett's story 'Brought to



the Gangway'), the sense of cosmic justice which informed Leggett's truly anti-flogging piece is absent: 'the measureless, fathomless, unchanging ocean - the image of eternity - these together [man and seal], constitute a spectacle of the most impressive character'.<sup>14</sup> Instead of fully exploiting Leggett's involving tale of the tension between a victimised sailor, and a cruel officer, White-Jacket's version lapses into windy display. Because he casts himself as the victim, although he can exclaim 'I meant to drag Captain Claret from this earthly tribunal of his to that of Jehovah, and let Him decide between us' (W-J 645), he actually has to be rescued by a petition from two leading sailors, which even he remarks 'was almost unprecedented'. White-Jacket's exploitation of this story is inept, and the result is to undercut his supposedly reformist purpose.

This is doubly the case because in using William Leggett, White-Jacket indicates his knowledge of one of the most independent and scathing social critics of the day. Although Leggett (1801-39) was an adherent to Jacksonian Democracy, in both his political and fictional writings this maverick figure denounced the 'aristocracy of wealth' with a thoroughness that alienated him from most of his elitist contemporaries:

These overnight 'creatures of the paper credit system' seem to forget that in America the people - 'we mean emphatically the class which labours with its own hands' - cumulatively hold ten times more of property and intelligence than the aristocracy. Who are the rich? Most of them men who started poor, with ordinary educations and a marked gift for intrigue. Are they made wiser by their carriages, their money (commonly, their mere credit), or their splendid houses? Does patriotism grow with the acquisition of a French cook and a box at the opera? Do learning and logic improve through the study of 'day-book, ledger, bills of exchange, bank promises, and notes of hand?' 'What folly is this?'<sup>15</sup>

Although with the hindsight of history, we may question the details of Leggett's analysis, it is still true that Leggett was perhaps not the

figure that the orthodox elitist White-Jacket would have been best advised to have invoked.

In each of these cases, White-Jacket's desire to engross his audience seems to predominate over the propriety of his actual source use. This is true also of the non-fictional sources that he employs. As has long been recognised, the fall from the yard arm at the end of the book is drawn from Nathaniel Ames' *Mariner's Sketches* (1830). In this work it is no more than a brief incident, of passing interest only, and far less significant than Ames' vituperative criticism of American elitist trade:

It was truly said during the 'forced trade' with the West Indies, that 'if there was a bag of coffee hanging over the middle of hell, there was not a merchant in New England that would not sell his soul to the devil to get it',<sup>16</sup>

White-Jacket's narrative, and the many critical considerations of his use of it, however, turn it into a figurative rebirth, freeing the young sailor before he enters port:

I strove to tear it off; but it was looped together here and there, and the strings were not then to be sundered by hand. I whipped out my knife, that was tucked at my belt, and ripped my jacket straight up and down, as if I were ripping open myself. With a violent struggle I then burst out of it, and was free. Heavily soaked, it slowly sank before my eyes.

Sink! sink! oh shroud! thought I; sink forever! accursed jacket that thou art, (W-J 764)

H.P.Vincent sees the fall as 'a parable of Melville's own creative necessity ... a metaphor of Melville's fall into life'; it demonstrates again the persistent conflation of Melville's biography with the clearly distinct experiences and attitudes of his narrators.<sup>17</sup>

Yet in so transforming Ames, it is clear that White-Jacket has selectively exploited his source, and also suppressed potent criticism of his own class and nation. What is interesting about this incident is that Ames, (d.1835), like Melville (and Leggett) was an educated man who went

to sea, was upset at what he found there, and used his subsequent writing as a way to call for change:

Ordinary, or rather very inferior tobacco, was sold to us [the sailors] at the rate of fifty cents a pound; jackets, which cost two dollars and fifty cents, or three dollars at farthest, were sold for seven dollars; and other indispensable articles in the same extortionate disproportion. But the owner is an 'honorable man', and so are 'all, honorable men', if they are rich, in Boston, particularly, and other places to a degree. (Ames p.164)

It is important to find such a group of disaffected people, all of whom were using the conservative sea genre as a platform from which to demand reform, whether openly like Ames, or subversively like Melville. It shows that Melville's reactions against his experiences were not isolated and stresses that because literature was seen to participate in the mercantile process, it could also be used to challenge it. Dana, the elitist propagandist and White-Jacket's mentor, described *Mariner's Sketches* as 'hasty and desultory', and seems to have written his own narrative to challenge it. Hence in expanding Ames' incident for his audience's greater diversion, White-Jacket has again tended to undercut his own purposes by drawing attention to the wider, dissentient, purpose of Ames' book.

White-Jacket's use of Samuel Leech's *Thirty Years from Home* (1833), is equally unfortunate. This is seen as the original for much of White-Jacket's anti-flogging sentiment, most directly Chapter 88 'flogging through the fleet'. Leech begins with an apology:

But for my desire to present the reader with a true exhibition of life on board a British man of war, it would be my choice to suppress these disgusting details of cruelty and punishment.<sup>18</sup>

These words are not empty display. Leech's text is certainly devoted to naval reform, but also to the use of barbarism at sea as a rhetorical means through which to promote Christian evangelism. This is clear from the 'Recommendations' with which the book is prefaced:



The undersigned, being acquainted with Mr Samuel Leech, the author of the following work, do cheerfully vouch for his moral and Christian character; and assure the public, that the interesting volume which he here presents to the world, may be relied upon as an honest statement of facts, with which the writer was personally conversant; and as having no fellowship whatever with those fictitious tales of the sea, which under the garb and the professions of truth, have been proffered to the reading community.

C. Adams Principal, Wesleyan Academy  
J. Bowers Pastor Congregational Church  
Wilbraham Massachusetts

These, which are typical of the 'authentications' that often prefaced eighteenth-century fictional travel narratives also, however, indicate to the reader that Leech's story has an ulterior purpose. Although White-Jacket echoes Leech's 'reluctance' to present the details of flogging, he nowhere advertises his own hidden motivation:

There are certain enormities in this man-of-war world that often secure impunity by their very excessiveness. Some ignorant people will refrain from permanently removing the cause of a deadly malaria, for fear of the temporary spread of its offensiveness. Let us not be of such. The more repugnant and repelling, the greater the evil. Leaving our women and children behind, let us freely enter this Golgotha, (W-J 737)

So by using the more explicitly motivated Leech, White-Jacket does not, as he presumably intended, reinforce his narrative; rather he problematizes it, rendering it susceptible to the inquiry of the suspicious reader.

The first point about these examples is that they show White-Jacket consciously creating his narrative out of other people's work. What he produces is in every sense derivative; it is not the naively factual, honest record that he suggests it to be. Comments such as this indicate the extent of his self-aware manipulation of previous books:

But if you want the best idea of Cape Horn, get my friend Dana's unmatched 'Two Years Before the Mast.' But you can read, and so you must have read it. His chapters describing Cape Horn must have been written with an icicle. (W-J 452)<sup>19</sup>

This method was attractive for White-Jacket, as for all Melville's

narrators, because it ensured a ready audience; while being 'composite' constructions, their narratives would of necessity seem to be typical. In itself, this typicality was not intended to be neutral, for it could reinforce class attitudes by rehearsing them in the context of apparently licit entertainment. As it was a largely conservative genre, White-Jacket could exploit the sea-story simultaneously to advance and obscure the class-inspired political project that he shared with his readers; his narrative could propagandise elitist Constitutionalism and Unionism, for instance.

Nevertheless, while White-Jacket may have shaped his selection to be seemingly bland, his actual choice of sources inhibited this intention. If we attend to the unincorporated parts of these works, we can expose White-Jacket's false homogenising and release the voices that he seeks to exclude. This process discovers his political purpose, as also the contrast between White-Jacket as manipulative narrator and the author Melville behind him; a repetition of my approach in dealing with *Typee* and *Omoo*.

There is much more to White-Jacket's intentions than can be discovered only by 'unstitching' his sources. If we conclude that White-Jacket used many different works to blend their 'intertwining influence' into 'a series of recognitions of the nature of life', we have fallen for the narrator's ploy. A more significant result from this 'gallimaufry of satire, allegory, and adventure' than 'a dimly sensed consciousness of man's finitude and his infinitude', is the fact that White-Jacket thereby advanced elitist conservatism. The intertextual web of his narrative was designed covertly to encode the political resolutions of the nineteenth-century elite that he represents, and to adumbrate these under the guise

of 'factual' observation and novel-reading enjoyment.<sup>20</sup> Like his predecessors, White-Jacket specifically exploits a genre; and like them, it is possible to reveal the motivation for his exploitation.

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v) The narrator's other narrative techniques

In addition to manipulating genre expectations, White-Jacket uses other techniques to propose his political message. He moves his narrative with great speed, loading it with descriptions and comments, shifting from scene to scene, and so attempting to hinder the reader from analysing its motivation. Similarly, he characteristically uses his voice to 'situate' other characters; his narrative becomes little more than an animated sequence, only unified by the voyage motif, the device of the ship, and White-Jacket's own presence:

Among such a crowd of marked characters as were to be met with on board our frigate, many of whom moved in mysterious circles beneath the lowermost deck, and at long intervals flitted into sight like apparitions, and disappeared again for whole weeks together, there were some who inordinately excited my curiosity, and whose names, callings, and precise abodes I industriously sought out, in order to learn something satisfactory concerning them ... I much lamented that no enterprising tar had yet thought of compiling a *Hand-book of the Neversink*, so that the tourist might have a reliable guide. (W-J 480)

Again, this form of narrative construction is neither naive nor merely 'factual'. This statement, for instance, is both the bland rhetorical groundwork for the comment 'but we are all Fatalists at bottom' (see above), and the equally partisan remark:

When I saw this grim old gunner firing away so solemnly, I thought it a strange mode of honoring a man's memory who had himself been slaughtered by a cannon. Only the smoke, that, after rolling in at the port-holes, rapidly drifted away to leeward, and was lost to view, seemed truly emblematical touching the personage thus honored, since that great non-combatant, the



Bible, assures us that our life is but a vapor, that quickly passeth away. (W-J 484)

Here the final words are the most significant; White-Jacket, who supposedly campaigns for the rights of sailors, seems more intent on courting his church-going audience with a Biblical reference than on pushing to its conclusion his analysis of the cruelty of being made to fight at sea. Such passing remarks reinforce the composite nature of the narrative; White-Jacket constructs it primarily from elements that he calculates will appeal to his readers. This fabrication is also clear in the way that the narrator exploits both his jacket and comparisons with the British Navy.

White-Jacket opens his narrative with a description of his extraordinary jacket: 'It was not a very white jacket, but white enough, in all conscience, as the sequel will show' (W-J 351). The garment immediately marks him out as someone different, with a character distinct from the rest of the *Neversink's* crew. Because he is allowed no paint to make the garment waterproof and hide its colour, White-Jacket becomes a figure of fun. Yet, although he is singled out, does he not relish the celebrity? Surely the jacket helps him to engage the reader's interest:

So far, very good; but pray, tell me, White-Jacket, how do you propose keeping out the rain and wet in this quilted *grago* of yours? You don't call this wad of old patches a Mackintosh do you? - You don't pretend to say that worsted is water-proof?

No, my dear friend; and that was the deuce of it. Waterproof it was not, no more than a sponge ... Of a damp day, my heartless shipmates even used to stand up against me, so powerful was the capillary attraction between this luckless jacket of mine and all drops of moisture. (W-J 352)

Indeed, this 'talking point' quality is the jacket's most significant function. To say that it was nearly his 'shroud' (W-J 351), and to describe the other sailors' reactions to it, gives White-Jacket a certain

status. The jacket is a polemical device, by which White-Jacket can encode his difference from most of the sailors around him.

Later in his narrative, for instance, he starts a chapter, 'I must make some further mention of that white jacket of mine' (W-J 384), and he repeats the tactic further on: 'again must I call attention to my white jacket, which about this time came near being the death of me' (W-J 427). In each of these cases, the narrator describes an incident caused by his extraordinary clothing, and thus each chapter refocusses the reader on White-Jacket and his narrative authority, rather than simply on what he is saying about life in the *Neversink*; hence the chapters ironically reinforce the 'veracity' of his descriptions. In each of them, he is able to court his audience to an even greater extent than elsewhere:

Oh, give me again the rover's life - the joy, the thrill, the whirl! Let me feel thee again, old sea! let me leap into thy saddle once more, I am sick of terra firma toils and cares; sick of the dust and reek of towns. (W-J 427-8)

Then, when he feels secure again, he remarks 'no more of my luckless jacket for a while', and proceeds to relate 'how they sleep in a man-of-war' (W-J 430).

Slowly, the narrator names himself White-Jacket (W-J 401).

Together, the name and the garment allow him to create an identity:

Marking all this from the beginning, I, White-Jacket, was sorely troubled with the idea, that, in the course of time, my own turn would come round to undergo the same objurgations. How to escape, I knew not. (W-J 410)

As this process continues, he again intends to draw the reader into it, so that White-Jacket's narrative supposedly becomes a joint project:

While now running rapidly away from the bitter coast of Patagonia, battling with the night-watches - still cold - as best we may; come under the lee of my white jacket, reader, while I tell of the less painful sights to be seen in a frigate. (W-J 476)

Thus White-Jacket engineers the movement of his relation so that when we

reach the final, declamatory chapters, he can actually disclaim responsibility, allowing them to appear as the expression of the 'corporate self'; narrator/reader/shared society:

Shall I tell of the Retreat of the Five Hundred inland; not, alas! in battle-array, as at quarters, but scattered broadcast over the land?

Shall I tell how the Neversink was at last stripped of spars, shrouds, and sails - had her guns hoisted out - her powder-magazine, shot-lockers, and armories discharged - till not one vestige of a fighting thing was left in her, from furthest stem to uttermost stern?

No! let all this go by; for our anchor still hangs from our bows, though its eager flukes dip their points in the impatient waves. Let us leave the ship on the sea - still with the land out of sight - still with brooding darkness on the face of the deep. I love an indefinite, infinite background - a vast, heaving, rolling, mysterious rear!

It is night. The meagre moon is in her last quarter. (W-J 766)

This is White-Jacket assuming the role of the 'bard', and preparing to articulate the generally accepted 'truths' of the narrative's last chapter.

Seen from this perspective, the jacket is not the metaphysical symbol beloved of modern critics, but another narrative device.<sup>21</sup> Its shedding at the end of the story signifies only that White-Jacket's relation is about to cease. The narrator uses it to give him a distinctive identity among the mass of the crew, so 'justifying' his categorising tale, and allowing him to reclaim audience sympathy should he ever feel persecuted (W-J 429). When he periodically waves it before our eyes, White-Jacket exploits the garment as a kind of bullfighter's cloak, with which to distract our attention from the hidden processes of his narrative.

This is also true of the many comparisons White-Jacket makes with conditions in the British Navy. These are again so frequent and deliberate that they become a structural feature, not an arbitrary occurrence. I have already discussed the way White-Jacket involved the British navy in his chapters on flogging, but as an example of his characteristic style, let us consider his comments on naval ceremonial.

In Chapter 40, he disparages American naval ceremonial by saying:



The general usages of the American Navy are founded upon the usages that prevailed in the Navy of monarchical England more than a century ago; nor have they been materially affected since, (W-J 520)

This is a jibe calculated to harm only navy officers; White-Jacket is careful to stress the preferable situation ashore, and to avoid antagonising his British readers:

And while both England, and America have become greatly liberalized in the interval; while shore pomp in high places has come to be regarded by the more intelligent masses of men as belonging to the absurd, ridiculous, and mock-heroic; while that most truly august of all majesties of earth, the President of the United States, may be seen entering his residence with his umbrella under his arm, and no brass band or military guard at his heels, and unostentatiously taking his seat by the side of the meanest citizen in a public conveyance; while this is the case, there still lingers in American men-of-war all the stilted etiquette and childish parade of the old-fashioned Spanish court of Madrid, (W-J 520)

The comparison with Britain is thus used not only to attack American naval officers, but primarily to propose a romanticised (but nevertheless 'acceptable') image of the 'common-touch' U.S. President. It helps White-Jacket reinforce the general elitist argument of his narrative - that 'we plain people' (the elite) refute 'aristocratic' pomp, and maintain only the genuine 'democracy' of the Presidential system (W-J 520).

Thus the British/American dialogue that White-Jacket establishes becomes another structural feature by which he can express his political affiliations while seeming to comment only on naval practice. Yet the extent to which the U.S. navy focussed the general political tensions of the mid-nineteenth-century has already been established, and is again discernible by introducing a comment from another author that compares American with British practice. In his *History of the Navy* (1839), James Fenimore Cooper acknowledges that the American system of naval rank was inspired by the British, and actually calls for more ranks and honours as 'great incentives' to loyalty: 'In addition to these military commissions

must be enumerated several professional dignities, with the incentives offered by knighthood and social rank'.<sup>22</sup> Cooper here argues against the historical tide of opinion, but shows how *White-Jacket*, in contrast, was resoundingly typical in his 'democratic' flourishes. It is only by probing these various narrative techniques that the full politicisation of *White-Jacket's* relation is revealed; he can otherwise succeed in his intention of making it appear valueless and unbiassed.

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vi) Melville's *White-Jacket*

To stress the way that *White-Jacket's* narrative is so consciously constructed, and to reveal its political purpose, as above, is to emphasize the gap between what we as Melville's sensitized readers and 'we' as typical nineteenth-century elitist readers will accept and enjoy. As in the previous novels, it is in this gap that Melville's own *White-Jacket* is located. In contrast to his narrator, who writes for the elite, and who expresses their opinions and desires, Melville as author writes against them, and against his own narrator. Did contemporaries understand Melville's intentions at all?

*White-Jacket's* first reviewers certainly appreciated that the book was a typical sea-story construction:

Great has been the company of the captains who have unfolded to the gentle readers, 'who stay at home at ease,' the mysteries of life on board the ship, Basil Hall, Marryatt [sic.], Chamier, Cooper, and many another epauletted author have written out their logbooks in narratives and descriptions ... Mr. Melville draws the same subject. (*Atlas* 9 Feb. 1850)

Moreover, they also appreciated that the jacket was a rhetorical ploy:

Mr. Melville's 'yarn' receives its baptismal appellation from a certain shirt which, owing to necessity perhaps, he was obliged to 'fit up' for duty in place of the rougher average *grago* which the sailor takes with him. Surely neither Mr. Nicoll's novelist nor the many minstrels of Moses ever threw a livelier interest around their *alpaca* wares, or other of the thousand pieces of clothing which they praise with so various a magniloquence, than the author of *Typee* imparts to his garment. (*Athenaeum* 2 Feb. 1850)

There is a certain 'knowingness' in this comment which establishes the reviewer's understanding of the jacket's function, as there is in this remark too:

Never has there been a more memorable White Jacket than this which gives the name to Mr. Melville's glowing log-book account of a year's cruise in a United States frigate. (*New York Tribune* 5 April 1850)

Charles Gordon Greene, moreover, always a penetrating reviewer of Melville, wrote:

This constant attempt to be smart, witty and entertaining on no capital, becomes dreadfully tedious to the reader ere he 'achieves' the end of a book of 465 pages. A little of it is all very well, but as poured out by Mr. Melville, in his stupid invention of a white-jacket, it appears to be a stream of egotism, vapidness and affectation, with, here and there, a fragment of amber on its waves. (*Boston Post* 10 April 1850)

This comes close to grasping that the jacket - and hence the narrator - are satirical constructions, in whom we are meant to place no faith.

Yet more typically, it appears that White-Jacket expressed contemporary attitudes so well that the reviews were highly complimentary. Indeed, reviewers consistently said that it was refreshing to meet a narrator who wrote as a 'common' sailor:

But all these pictures were sketched from the quarter deck. Even when the common seaman was made the apparent portrait-painter, his perspective referred invariably to that sacred spot where he himself dare not utter a grumbling word. Mr. Melville draws the same subject, but with the fore-castle for his point of sight. The outline here is very different, the colouring harsher, and the resulting impression less pleasant; though, we fear, much more true. (*Atlas* 9 Feb. 1850)

This remark fully demonstrates how successfully White-Jacket has convinced his audience of his 'probity'. More importantly, it also demonstrates that



contemporary reviewers were largely happy to acquiesce in the narrator's political stage-play. As we have seen, White-Jacket's narrative fully participates in a contemporary struggle that extended across society. By using the naval setting and the sea story genre, the representative narrator joins his elite sponsors to reinforce the Constitution and the class system. In seeing White-Jacket's relation as another voice from the fore-castle, like Dana's (!), the reviewers, and thus the audience, demonstrate their own complicity:

The bustling little world of a Man-of-war has often been described, but never before in the truthful colors of Mr. Melville's picture now lying before us. Our accounts of man-of-war's-men heretofore have been written in the melodramatic style; heroic sailors and epic quarter-deck characters, romantic incidents and stirring sea scenes have furnished the staple of naval romances. But no-one had yet lifted the veil which covers the man-of-war's real 'life below stairs' - (*Saroni's Musical Times* 30 March 1850)

To read such a class-biassed narrative as White-Jacket's, and then to comment thus, reveals to a modern commentator the cohesiveness of the mid-nineteenth-century literary establishment as it sought to exploit literature's propagandistic capability. Moreover, the way that the reviewers emphasised White-Jacket's supposedly 'common seaman' status testifies to the elite's continuing desire, and ability, to mystify and obscure its own origins.

Much of Melville's indictment in *White-Jacket* is, therefore, conveyed by simply eliciting and exposing this institutional complicity. Although he wrote it, like *Redburn*, at great speed, Melville still felt that he didn't 'repress' himself much in *White-Jacket*.<sup>22</sup> The book can be seen as a challenge to the institution; can it possibly accept this 'voice from the fore-castle' which is so patently a fraud? The fact that the contemporary audience did, because it recognised in White-Jacket its own voice and attitudes, is Melville's charge of guilt. He reveals in *White-Jacket* that

his fellows would sacrifice reform itself for an evening's 'entertainment'.

And yet, this angry accusation that the author levels at his elitist society is also tempered with his characteristic continuing wish to educate that society into its attitudes, before it is too late. White-Jacket's narrative is itself flawed: his source use is improvident, his narrative techniques can be exposed. Even for a contemporary, very little effort would have been required to have denounced White-Jacket's relation, if only that person were to have read with attention, and to have considered what was being presented to them, and how. In concluding this chapter, I shall give a few further instances of the ways that Melville created a text which could have sensitized the audience to the author's own dissentient stance.

It will be remembered that *Saroni's Musical Times* complemented the book, because it said there were no 'heroic sailors and epic quarter-deck characters' to be found in it. This is a patent untruth, and further evidence that reviewers and readers, when suitably prompted, frequently saw only what they wanted to see in the works that they read. Surely Jack Chase, White-Jacket's friend and mentor, is the most 'heroic' of all sailors:

First and foremost was Jack Chase, our noble First Captain of the Top. He was a Briton, and a true-blue; tall and well-knit, with a clear open eye, a fine broad brow, and an abounding nut-brown beard. No man ever had a better heart or a bolder. He was loved by the seamen and admired by the officers; and even when the Captain spoke to him, it was with a slight air of respect. Jack was a frank and charming man. (W-J 360)

Chase, having served in the Royal Navy, quits his ship to fight for South American freedom from Spain, and earns the narrator's greatest admiration:

But with what purpose had he deserted? To avoid naval discipline? to riot in some abandoned sea-port? for love of some worthless signorita? Not at all. He abandoned the frigate from far higher and nobler, nay, glorious motives.

Though bowing to naval discipline afloat; yet ashore, he was a stickler for the Rights of Man, and the liberties of the world. He went to draw a partisan blade in the civil commotions of Peru; and befriend, heart and soul, what he deemed the cause of the Right. (W-J 365)

Yet this 'by-blow of some British Admiral' (W-J 361) is more reminiscent of Dibdin's Tom Bowling - the romanticised hero of ballad and fable - than of any real-life sailor:

Here, a sheer hulk, lies poor Tom Bowling,  
The darling of our crew;  
No more he'll hear the tempest howling,  
For death has broach'd him to.  
His form was of the manliest beauty,  
His heart was kind and soft,  
Faithful, below, he did his duty,  
But now he's gone aloft.<sup>24</sup>

And this is the point: he is meant to be incredible, and to arouse the reader's suspicions. We have already remarked this in noticing that it is Chase who governs dress and behaviour in the main-top, but it can also be seen when, for instance, he goes to plead shore leave for the crew in Rio harbour. This is no more than a piece of theatre with Chase assuming the role of the people's tribune. As soon as the commodore sees him conversing with Captain Claret, he knows what the top-man wants: "Well, Jack, you and your shipmates are after some favor, I suppose - a day's liberty, is it not?" (W-J 572). Thus Chase's subservience to gain his request is actually only sham, for it is understood that it will be granted before the display begins:

"Valiant Commodore," said he, at last, "this audience is indeed an honor undeserved. I almost sink beneath it. Yes, valiant Commodore, your sagacious mind has truly divined our object. Liberty, sir; liberty is, indeed, our humble prayer. I trust your honorable wound, received in glorious battle, valiant Commodore, pains you less to-day than common." (W-J 573)

All assent to Chase's performance because through it those with power (including Chase) retain their influence; while the oppression of the common sailors is resumed after their 'holiday'. Chase's assured behaviour



denotes his awareness of his own security: 'And long and lingeringly bowing to the two noble officers, Jack backed away from their presence, still shading his eyes with the broad brim of his hat' (W-J 573).

The ritual of performance is vital in this context because it is the way of preserving Chase's dominance among the crew. Hence the delay between the audience and the actual order itself is largely irrelevant, for the men's anger is necessary: "'It's turned out gammon, Jack," said one.' (W-J 584). The sense of release when the request is granted serves to reinforce Chase's position massively: 'In a paroxysm of delight, a young mizzen-top-man, standing by at the time, whipped the tarpaulin from his head, and smashed it like a pancake on the deck. "Liberty!" he shouted.' (W-J 584). Throughout the display, Chase has remained sanguine: "'I'm your tribune boys; I'm your Rienzi. The Commodore must keep his word"' (W-J 584 my emphasis). And that other political initiate, White-Jacket, is also well aware of the strategem:

Whenever, in intervals of mild benevolence, or yielding to mere politic dictates, Kings and Commodores relax the yoke of servitude, they should see to it well that the concession seem not too sudden or unqualified; for, in the commoner's estimation, that might argue feebleness or fear, (W-J 584)

Yet, because this grim comment on social control has been extended by the Commodore's initial refusal, Melville can use it as a demonstration of political theatre. Chase's hegemony may never be in doubt, but in the sailor's extended pantomime Melville has drawn to the reader's attention the processes by which power is maintained and operated.

This is also true of the theatricals organised for the fourth of July, in which the men are allowed limited liberty; they can act out 'freedom' in a play entitled *The Old Wagon Paid Off*. Doing so induces a sense of comradeship across the social classes; while the play is being

performed, as White-Jacket indicates, social divisions seem to be abolished and a common audience established: 'I thought to myself, this now is as it should be. It is good to shake off, now and then, this iron yoke around our necks' (W-J 447). Once the play is over, however, he apparently laments that the officers have 'shipped their quarter-deck faces again' (W-J 448), as an old sailor puts it. But his tone in previously 'moralising' (W-J 447) betrays him, for when he says that liberty should be enjoyed 'now and then' (my emphasis), he indicates his knowledge that in his society 'liberty' for the masses is at most watching a play about liberty; not possessing the right itself. Whether the play is the play of an election, or the play of a book, or the play of the theatre, as long as some such sops are intermittently offered, dissent will be neutralised and people will be led to think that they are free. This analysis reminds us of the points Melville wished to advertise in the scroll in *Mardi*; the *Neversink* theatricals are informed by the established convention of the 'feast of fools', in which kings and bishops relinquished their power for a day to boys and 'idiots', knowing that they would resume augmented authority on the morrow. By asserting bonds that are allowed to exist for as long as the play is running, performances such as this exploit an illusory community between the various classes, and suggest that there is no difference between rulers and ruled, sailors and elite. In apparently suggesting some common identity, they make it much more difficult for the ordinary sailors to complain of their lot with any justification, and so strengthen the prevailing power structures; which is why the theatricals were permitted in the first place.

Unsurprisingly Chase is again the arch-protagonist in this drama:

Matchless Jack, *in full fig*, bowed again and again, with true quarter-deck grace and self-possession; and when five or six untwisted strands of rope and



# WINTER GARDEN.

Lessee and Manager.....W. STUART  
Stage Manager.....J. O. HANLEY  
Treasurer.....H. J. JACKSON

## GREATEST SUCCESS OF THE SEASON.

This evening, Brougham's world famous Extravaganza, **Pocahontas!** The Great Comedian John Brougham as Pow-ha-tan. The young and beautiful Comedienne, Miss Emilie McVillie as Pocahontas.

J. C. Dunn as Capt. John Smith.  
This Evening, will be presented, with New Scenery, Costumes, and Appointments, John Brougham's Original—Ab-original—Erratic—Operatic—Demi-Civilized, and Demi-Savage Extravaganza, in 1 act, being a Per Version of Ye Trave and Wonderful History of Ye Renowned Princess,

# PO-CA-HON-TAS!

Or, Ye Gentle Savage.

Dramatic Personæ—of Ye English.

Capt. John Smith, the undoubted original, vocal and instrumental, in the settlement of Virginia, in love with Po-ca-hon-tas, according to this story, though somewhat at variance with his story.....J. C. DUNN  
Lieut. Thomas Brown, second in command a liberal neglected genius, whose claims on popularity are now, for the first time, acknowledged as his right.....J. MILET  
William Arwen, sometimes called Bill, son of the same sort.....DUN BROWN  
Myshere Roll, the real husband of Pocahontas, but dramatically divorced, contrary to all law and fact.....C. M. WALCOTT, Jr.  
Benjamin Brace.....(Splices of male braces, shivers of timbers).....MR. GO-ANHEAD  
John Jank.....(general dealers in single combats, double).....MR. COME-UP  
Henry Halyard.....(burropees, and altogether amazingly naughty).....MR. PFARM  
William Bentline.....(oil people).....MR. MAST HEAD

### Of Ye Savages.

SE. H. H. POW-HA-TAN I, King of the Tuscarroras—a crochety Monarch—in fact a Semi-Brave.....MR. JOSEPH BROUGHAM  
Right Hon. Quashal Jaw, Speaker of the Savage House of Lords—straightener of supplest kinks, an orator of troubled waters, variegator of knotty points, adjuster of pugnacious dilemmas, and Grand Eye Parliamentary Factotum and Fagman.....T. J. LEON  
D po dii-doc, one of the Aborigines F. F. V. S., an indignant dilectary.....J. DUNN  
Coh-o-roo, another warm headed and hearted son of Old Virginia, the entering.....W. S. ANDREWS  
Mi Jin-go, Sergeant at-Arms, a friend to swear by.....MR. WADDLETON  
Ip-pen-kah.....(Medical Men of the Savits).....J. BULL  
Kod-liv-ryul.....(and Panna-ca Tribes).....A. FIRM  
Katomel.....A. GEW  
SE. H. H. PRINCESS PO-CA-HON-TAS, the beautiful and very properly undaunted Daughter of King Pow-ha-tan, married according to the ridiculous dictum of actual circumstances to Master Roll, but the author Antlers himself much more advantageously disposed of in the acting edition.....MISS EMILIE MCVILLIE  
Po-see pet.....(Interesting offshoots from the a latocratic stock, anterior to the straggle of Virginia, embodying the right principles of the Tuscarroras Fashion).....MISS FANNY STOCQUILLER  
Wen-hs-ven-da.....(ing the right principles of the Tuscarroras Fashion).....MISS MARY CARR  
Kroo so-sa-ha.....(this Flaming School).....MISS MOORE

### Music Incidental to the Piece.

Solo and Chorus—"O, how about it?".....Pow-ha-tan and Chorus  
Air—"Wild a Deaden".....Pow-ha-tan  
Solo and Chorus—"Come Forward".....Pow-ha-tan and Indians  
Grand Solo—"As you are, ok".....John Smith and Indians  
Variation—"Where the ladders".....Pow-ha-tan and Indians  
Quartet and Chorus—"Fill now the Flowing Glass".....Pow-ha-tan, Po-ca-hon-tas and Smith  
Grand Finale—"Efficiency—Furico—E Conglomerate".....Po-ca-hon-tas and Indians  
Crisis, let us now like Watch Dogs Bark.....John Smith and Po-ca-hon-tas  
Operatic Duet.....John Smith and Po-ca-hon-tas  
Characteristic Concerted Piece—"Now for a jolly encounter".....Po-ca-hon-tas, John Smith, Pow-ha-tan  
Grand Finale—"And now we have done our duty".....John Smith, Pow-ha-tan, Po-ca-hon-tas and Chorus

## THE SCOTIA POLKA.

Composed by JOHN BROUGHAM, and dedicated to Captain JUDITH.

The orchestral arrangement by ROBERT STORPEL.

Part 1.—The Departure—"Warning Bell"—Steam up—Paddle Wheel Accompaniment—Dinner—"Life on the Ocean Wave."  
Part 2.—A Dark Day—Trouble Ahead—The Chief Engineer puts on his "Red weather shirt"—The "Deck" is a Storm—The Wind Whistle, so does the "Box"—The Thunder Speaks, so does the Commodore.  
Part 3.—"All's Well"—Glass rises—Sea falls—Passengers jolly—An eight day trip—The "Arrived" and the "Welcome Home."

## CAPE HORN THEATRE.

Grand Celebration of the Fourth of July.

DAY PERFORMANCE.

UNCOMMON ATTRACTION.

## THE OLD WAGON PAID OFF!

JACK CHASE.....PERCY ROYAL-MAST.

STARS OF THE FIRST MAGNITUDE.

For this time only.

## THE TRUE YANKEE SAILOR.

The managers of the Cape Horn Theatre beg leave to inform the inhabitants of the Pacific and Southern Oceans that, on the afternoon of the Fourth of July, 184—, they will have the honor to present the admired drama of

## THE OLD WAGON PAID OFF!

Commodore Bougee .....Tom Brown, of the Fore-top.  
Captain Spy-glass .....Ned Brace, of the After-Guard.  
Commodore's Cockswain .....Joe Bunk, of the Launch.  
Old Luff .....Quarter-master Coffin.  
Mayor .....Seafull, of the Forecastle.  
PERCY ROYAL-MAST .....JACK CHASE.  
Mrs. Lovelorn .....Long-locks, of the After-Guard.  
Toddy Moll .....Frank Jones.  
Gin and Sugar Sall .....Dick Dash.  
Sailors, Marines, Bar-keepers, Crimps, Aldermen, Police-officers, Soldiers, Landsmen generally.

Long live the Commodore! || Admission Free.

To conclude with the much-admired song by Dibdin, altered to suit all American Tars, entitled

## THE TRUE YANKEE SAILOR.

True Yankee Sailor (in costume), Patrick Flinegan,  
Captain of the Head.

Performance to commence with "Hail Columbia," by the Braw Band. Ensign rises at three bells, P.M. No sailor permitted to enter in his shirt-sleeves. Good order is expected to be maintained. The Master-at-arms and Ship's Corporals to be in attendance to keep the peace.

## SLAVES IN ALGIERS;

OR, A

## STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM:

A PLAY,

INTERSPERSED WITH SONGS,

IN THREE ACTS.

By MRS. ROWSON.

AS PERFORMED

AT THE

NEW THEATRE,

IN

PHILADELPHIA AND BALTIMORE.

PHILADELPHIA:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR, BY WRIGLEY AND  
BARKINLEY, No 149, CHESTNUT-STREET.

MDCCLXXIV

Real play bills from 1794 and 1855,  
together with that from the  
Neversink theatricals.<sup>6</sup>



bunches of oakum were thrown to him, as substitutes for bouquets, he took them one by one, and gallantly hung them from the buttons of his jacket. (W-J 446)

Such acting, as we know, is not alien to Chase, but an extension of his usual social operation, which is why he is deemed to be so good at it. Yet, as in the instance above, Chase's ability to hog attention is also turned against him to reveal his acumen, for it is when he is in full flight that a threatened squall requires the theatricals to end. While it is again impossible to attribute this cessation directly to the author's 'intervention', it is clear that the incident has been used by Melville to exemplify the tactics of class hegemony. This is so not only because of Chase's involvement, but because of the inclusion of the theatre bill-board. The board, which parallels exactly those in use on the contemporary stage, thereby indicates Melville's wish to turn the theatricals aboard the *Neversink* into a comment on the general state of nineteenth-century U.S. society. The typographic representation of the poster recalls the Round-Robin in *Omoo*, and is used by Melville to illustrate a parallel point.

I feel that both of these episodes, which expose contemporary methods of social control, were included by Melville as further attempts to educate his audience. Only one reviewer, the perceptive Greene, seemed to understand at least a little of the author's intentions, calling Chase: 'a stage sailor, and that of the most bombastic kind' (Boston *Post* 10 April 1850)<sup>25</sup>. Most others agreed to connive in White-Jacket's presentation, and accepted his narrative as 'truth'. So the approbation with which the novel was greeted initially dulled its critical force. Yet this was still present, and in *Moby-Dick*, Melville's next book, would be felt with unmistakable impact. *White-Jacket*, however, should not be relegated; it

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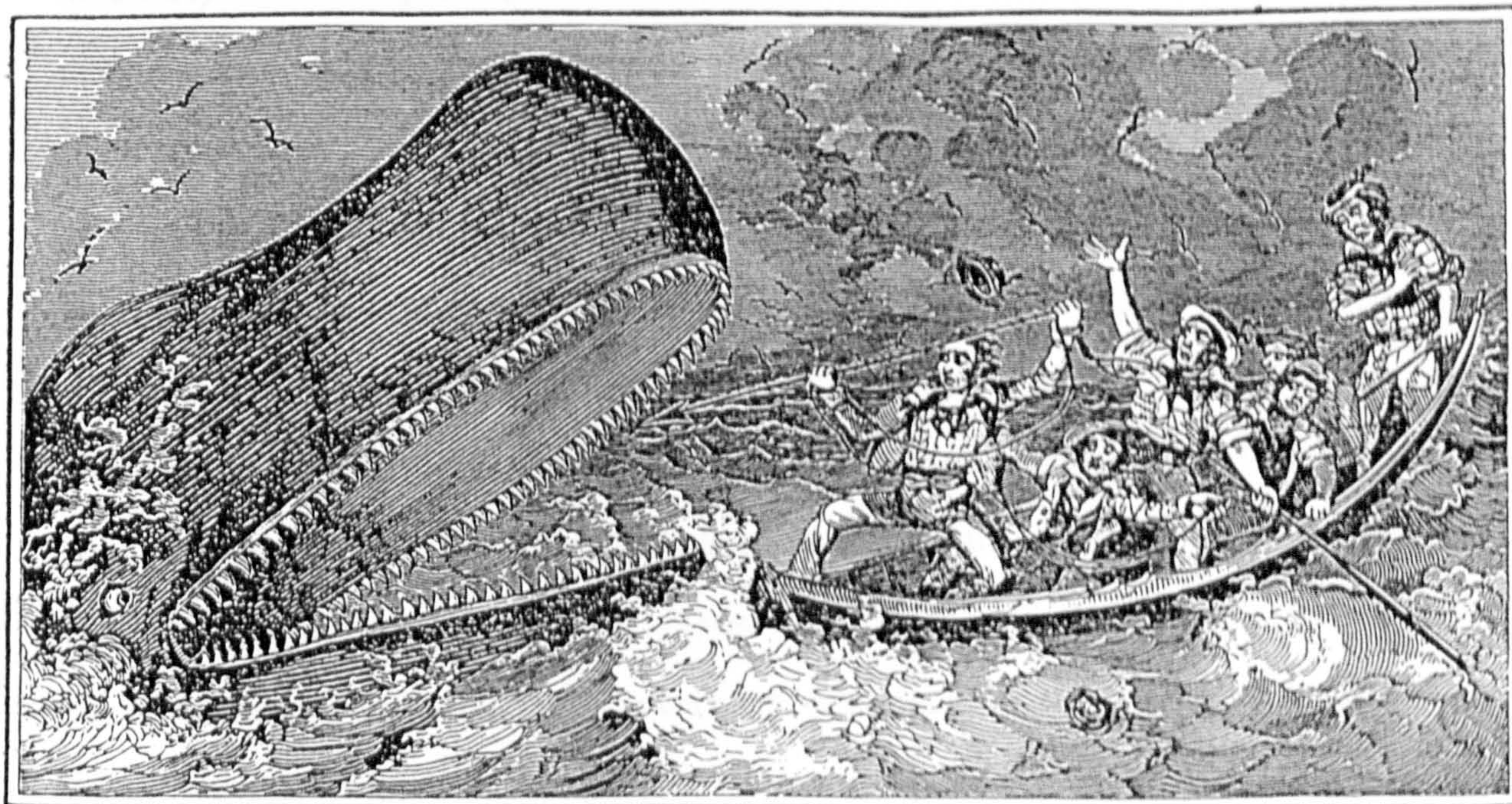
was through considering Chase, and his manipulation by the narrator, that I first began to consider such processes and tactics in Melville's work as a whole. White-Jacket was the first Melville narrator whom I realised was a representative presence, and it was the author's laying bare of the processes of his narrator's fictional construction that first led me to consider Melville's work as revealing this elitist project. In its own way, the book expressed Melville's dissent just as clearly as *Moby-Dick*.



## MOBY-DICK

'The question of audience was a  
pressing one.'

Larzer Ziff





*Moby-Dick* was published in October and November 1851. Leon Howard calls it the fruit of Melville's 'second growth'; a phrase which fully captures the book's vigour. Yet the novel is clearly Melvillean in subject and method, and should always be seen in the context of the author's other early works.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, like both *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick* seeks to express judgment on mid-nineteenth-century elite society, and to exploit the frame established by its predecessors to do this. As *Moby-Dick* is now perhaps Melville's most popular book, I shall not summarise its action as I have done previously.<sup>2</sup>

#### 1) First Considerations

*Moby-Dick* certainly exhibits a sense of Mardian urgency. This intensity has frequently been attributed to the new friendship between Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne. While Hawthorne's influence may, indeed, have been significant, I see other pressures on Melville, pre-eminently his own sense of social and political outrage. Although *Moby-Dick* was not marked by global events such as the 1848 Revolutions, it was shaped by growing U.S. political tensions, as demonstrated in the 1850 Compromise, and also by the general trend of Western industrialised society. In order to write *Moby-Dick*, Melville left New York for the quieter surroundings of a farm that he had bought in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. This withdrawal to a haven imbued with the spirit of his child-hood friend, the maverick Uncle Thomas, suggests the purposiveness with which he wrote. Although he entertained New York acquaintances, and cultivated Hawthorne, he also shielded himself from the literary establishment. In 1851, for instance, he declined an invitation to a New York memorial dinner for Fenimore

Cooper, yet as he was in the city almost immediately after the event his stated reasons to Rufus Griswold for not going may not have been his real ones.<sup>3</sup>

I have already referred to the 1850 Compromise in Chapter 6 (*White-Jacket*) above, and suggested that its effect was to avert civil conflict for another decade, so perpetuating the political and economic power of the social elite. As David Potter comments: '[the Compromise] had reached a settlement of issues which four preceding sessions of Congress had been unable to handle'. Yet Potter distinguishes between negotiated 'settlement' and actual 'compromise', so suggesting that Congressional fixing was not the only factor in the equation. The massive growth of the U.S. economy held all sections of the nation, and all classes of the population in its grip. Impelled by the continental expansion which the Compromise facilitated, the U.S.A was reaping the economic consequences of a new and vast internal market. When war eventually came in 1861, one of its prime causes was the wish by the South to resist what it saw as the economic alliance of North and West; an alliance that was symbolized by the threat of a Pacific railroad. In one sense, then, the 1850 political Compromise created the conditions for the later war, by enabling industrialization and mechanization to flourish, especially away from the South. The American Civil War, with its machine-guns, trains, and iron-clads, was the first mechanized capitalist war.<sup>4</sup>

In *Redburn*, Melville had already considered the social effects of trans-Atlantic trade; by 1850 the industrialisation that accompanied this mercantile traffic was mushrooming in the U.S. as well as Britain. Already by 1830, mill towns such as Lowell had sprung up in the Eastern states. This was the factor which was to give the North its decisive advantage.

But the prime U.S. example of technological enterprise and investment was whaling, the largest American industry of the ante-bellum era. It was to this that Melville turned in *Moby-Dick*. His novel scrutinised the driving force that underlay contemporary American society.

From 1846-51, 638 vessels worth \$20,000,000 operated from thirty-nine East Coast ports. \$70,000,000 (\$997,200,000 in 1982 values) was invested in an industry that employed 70,000 people. Whaling was the power-house of the mid-century U.S. economy, generating not only oil, bone, and related products, but huge amounts of capital for re-investment. As we have seen, it encouraged American involvement in the Pacific, initially in Hawaii (which was annexed in 1898), but also in the purchase of Alaska (the Bering Strait was a vital ground). In each move, the association of economic with political imperialism is obvious.<sup>8</sup>

Thus 1850s America was marked by two interrelated features: the elite's political Compromise and elite-inspired industrialisation. Although we may never know precisely what led Melville to write *Moby-Dick*, and although we must speculate more than we had to in *Mardi*, it does seem from the evidence of his earlier books that he was interested in these issues that centred around the Compromise. Moreover, he had his own knowledge of working as a whaler; a job which he had undertaken as one of his first acts of dissent from his elitist family. The fact that he dropped the idea of a novel based on a Revolutionary War veteran for one set in the whaling industry suggests to me that the conjunction of his youthful experience with political and economic events produced *Moby-Dick*. This was not so much an 'artistic' choice as Melville's response to historical necessity. The book articulated his attitude to the state of America in 1851.



## 11) The Judgment of the Whale

To express that attitude, Melville returned to first principles, for as in *Typee*, the key element in *Moby-Dick* is an 'alien' presence. Whereas before this was the coherent society of the *Typee* valley, in *Moby-Dick* this presence is the whale. Both the islanders and the whale are oppositional elements, paralleled in Melville's early fiction perhaps only by Jackson in *Redburn*. Each one challenges Western society in the person of the representative narrator, forcing that person to 'manage' his narrative record of his experiences; it is this artfully constructed record that is presented for the reader. With the tuition that we have undergone in reading the intervening novels, this management should be easily discerned.

There is a major structural difference, however, between the *Typees* and *Moby Dick*. While Tommo is able to perpetrate an act of violence on them, and to seriously injure their society, the white whale sinks the *Pequod*, so sending this symbol of the Western world to the sea bed. This whale eludes American technology, and actually exacts his vengeance upon it. This sinking of the *Pequod* is the 'judgment' made by the whale upon the contemporary West.

Since Leo Marx and Alan Heimert, it has been relatively standard to suggest that the attack on the ship expresses Melville's refutation of aspects of his society.<sup>6</sup> Whether the *Pequod* is said to signify the newly industrialised U.S., or as Heimert suggests, to typify sectional divisions, the sinking is generally understood to have some political significance. I diverge from traditional readings in stressing the extent of Melville's

disaffection, and in attributing different meanings to the central presences of the novel. My taxonomy breaks the text into four main elements: The narrator, the *Pequod*, Ahab, and the whale. The chapter will consider each in turn.

The basic argument is that Ishmael, the narrator, is compelled to produce a flawed narrative; his attempt to deal with the challenge of the whale. What he calls the 'grand hooded phantom' (*M-D* 800), controls the way that he writes. Having been plucked from the waves after the *Pequod* sank, and now sitting at his desk conducting his reader on the cetological tour and the history of the hunt for Moby Dick, Ishmael tries to use his narrative as a way to silence the white whale's threat. Yet he is unable adequately to perpetrate this upon Moby Dick, or, even, to control his fictional characters such as Ahab or Queequeg. Unlike Tommo, who relatively successfully 'situates' his characters, but like Taji and Redburn, Ishmael's futile attempts consistently expose and subvert his own position. The frequent exaggeration of his tone as it breaks under the pressure exerted by the whale is a register of his weakness:

Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness. (*M-D* 1239)

In Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael's narrative expresses the failure of the representative narrator; he is the elitist presence who cannot successfully accomplish his task.

Yet the author does not simply allow his own attitudes to be demonstrated through the medium of another character; as with the Typees, Moby Dick is not exactly Melville's proxy. Rather, the white whale's

significance in the novel is a reciprocal function of Ahab's and Ishmael's attitudes to him. They are the ones who endow him with power. Ahab and his ship embody all the 'negative' nineteenth-century forces against which Moby Dick stands as a kind of 'positive'. Ishmael's narrative memoirs, which are written as almost an act of self-exorcism, in describing the whale also liberate and enable him. In a sense, Moby Dick is the narrator's 'unconscious' - that which he wishes to suppress - and so much energy is invested in the act of suppression which is the creation of the story, that the whale himself is revived and allowed to come crashing into sight. The vast forces that Ishmael energises by his first sentences must inevitably re-enact the original drama of the *Pequod*. In doing so, because Ishmael is a representative figure and so incorporates in his narrative the contemporary rhetoric and attitudes of mid-nineteenth-century America, his narrative failure to dominate his story enacts in miniature what will also be American society's fate. Moby Dick's destruction of the *Pequod* is a prolepsis of the destruction to be levelled in the U.S.A by the forces of economic capitalism in the Civil War. Moby Dick in the novel only ever reacts, he never acts; he is called into retaliation by the whaling industry as its unconscious anti-type. His judgment could have been avoided.

Hence an important feature of the book is that Ishmael consistently attempts to deny the full ramifications of this judgment. Having been plucked once from the water, Ishmael could have written to warn his audience of the course on which they-it is set. Yet in his forced humour, his self-mockery, his portrayals of Ahab as insane, and of the whale as a mythical beast, Ishmael refuses this chance.



## 111) Ishmael as Representative Narrator

Like his predecessors, Ishmael is the representative of the values of that elitist novel-reading audience. The parallels between *Moby-Dick* and Melville's other early books are extensive; the author uses the textual strategy that he has been developing throughout his career, and in *Moby-Dick* it reaches great refinement. Yet Ishmael's elitism is not necessarily self-evident, especially given the legacy of criticism which sees him as the repository of good qualities, the man who learns tolerance and the necessity to balance between the 'lee shore' and the 'howling infinite' (*M-D* 906), the philosophy of the 'mast head' and the political compulsion of the 'quarterdeck'.<sup>7</sup>

But to me, Ishmael is the apologist of nineteenth-century elite society; the figure in the novel who is repudiated by the author, and who becomes the butt of his satire. Ishmael is racist, snobbish, and partisanly American, acting as the spokesman for the great U.S. whaling industry:

And thus have these naked Nantucketers, these sea hermits, issuing from their ant-hill in the sea, overrun and conquered the watery world like so many Alexanders; parcelling out among them the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans, as the three pirate powers did Poland. Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English over-swarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketers. (*M-D* 861)

Before analysing *Moby-Dick* any further, it is thus necessary to consider the narrator in some detail. It will be found that his voice, his attitudes, and his method of narrative construction all cohere with those of his predecessors, so that his representative function in the text is the same as theirs.

Ishmael introduces himself in Chapter 1 'Loomings'. His voice is strong, jocular and determined to entertain. Embedded within it, however, are indications of the kind of audience for whom he is writing:

Having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen, and regulating the circulation. (*M-D* 795)

This appeals to the leisured classes; people who may well travel to 'take a cure', or simply to visit new places. Here Ishmael is courting the readers of travel-narratives. It is unimportant that he is currently poor, for he is a man who accords himself 'a strong moral principle' (*M-D* 795); another feature which would have been attractive to Bible-reading, tract-distributing, contemporaries. Indeed, Ishmael parallels White-Jacket in emphasising his democratic self-reliance:

I never go as a passenger; nor, though I am something of a salt, do I ever go to sea as a Commodore, or a Captain, or a Cook. I abandon the glory and distinction of such offices to those who like them. (*M-D* 797)

He then, unsurprisingly, invokes the image of Dana: 'No, when I go to sea, I go as a simple sailor, right before the mast, plumb down into the fore-castle, aloft there to the royal mast-head' (*M-D* 798).

So Ishmael claims to be moral, anti-'aristocratic' in the authentic American tradition, and an Emersonian individualist, who will accept the responsibility for his own actions. We have already seen that the rhetoric of 'democracy' usually obscured a class-bound perception of society, and it is interesting that in Ishmael's case this is combined with strongly-advocated individualism. This recurs when he exalts Bulkington as the self-reliant hero:

But as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shore-less, indefinite as God - so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety! (*M-D* 906)

Yet this surely recalls the satirised Taji, indicating the distance between Melville's own valuation, and that of his narrator. Moreover, self-reliance is fiercely criticised in the later tale *Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs* (1854), in which it is implied that only application is needed to reap a harvest from Nature:

'Then "Poor Man's Manure" is "Poor Man's Eye-water" too?'

'Exactly. And what could be more economically contrived? One thing answering two ends - ends so very distinct,'\*

Already then, in his opening chapter Ishmael's voice delineates not only his proximity to his elitist audience, but also the distance between him and the author. Indeed, Ishmael quietly claims the social status that Melville rejected:

It touches one's sense of honor, particularly if you come of an old established family in the land, the Van Rensselaers, or Randolphs, or Hardicanutes. (*M-D* 798)

Although the last name is a joke, the others refer to prominent American families, and it can be seen that Ishmael is setting himself in the same class as them. Throughout his narrative, he makes small comments that signify both his own perception of social status, and the kind of audience for which he is writing. Elsewhere in Chapter 1 he appeals to shared interests such as art (*M-D* 796), which through the American Art Union was currently enjoying great vogue, and he frequently returns to this common bond: 'I shall ere long paint you as well as one can without canvas, something like the true form of the whale'.<sup>2</sup> Later in his narrative he says to his reader 'If your banker breaks, you snap; if your apothecary by mistake sends you poison in your pills, you die' (*M-D* 1135), and he also evokes the kind of society from which whaling provides escape:

You hear no news; read no gazettes; extras with startling accounts of commonplaces never delude you into unnecessary excitements; you hear of no domestic afflictions; bankrupt securities; fall of stocks; are never troubled



with the thought of what you shall have for dinner. (M-D 958)

This, clearly, is the life that Ishmael envisages is his audience's. It is not one of physical labour in a factory or field, but of managerial tension; it is the drawing-room life of the elite.

Such comments establish Ishmael's voice, but he also shares his predecessors' attitudes, especially to people of different race, as is obvious in his relationship with Queequeg, the islander whom he meets in New Bedford.

Ishmael initially tries to categorise the Polynesian, and to fit him to his own preconceptions. For example, at first unable to believe that the harpooneer could not be a white man, he typically recoils:

It was now quite plain that he must be some abominable savage or other shipped aboard of a whaler in the South Seas, and so landed in this Christian country. I quaked to think of it. A peddler of heads too - perhaps the heads of his own brothers. He might take a fancy to mine - heavens! look at that tomahawk! (M-D 816)

He here displays the usual prejudice about race, religion and cannibalism. Similarly, Ishmael watches Queequeg get out of bed, 'observing' him as a curiosity, just as Tommo observes the Typees:

A man like Queequeg you don't see every day, he and his ways were well worth unusual regarding.

He commenced dressing at top by donning his beaver hat, a very tall one, by the by, and then - still minus his trousers - he hunted up his boots. What under the heavens he did it for, I cannot tell, but his next movement was to crush himself - boots in hand, and hat on under the bed - (M-D 822)

Typically, he tries to use his language to 'situate' Queequeg, and so control him by satire:

He was just enough civilized to show off his outlandishness in the strangest possible manner. His education was not yet completed. He was an undergraduate. If he had not been a small degree civilized, he very probably would not have troubled himself with boots at all; but then, if he had not been still a savage, he never would have dreamt of getting under the bed to put them on. (M-D 823)

Again, when Ishmael returns to the Spouter-Inn to see Queequeg reading, he immediately slips into a characteristic posture:

He would then begin again at the next fifty; seeming to commence at number one each time, as though he could not count more than fifty, and it was only by such a large number of fifties being found together, that his astonishment at the multitude of pages was excited. (*M-D* 846)

Although he then says 'you cannot hide the soul' (*M-D* 846), which seems to indicate a genuine sympathy for the harpooneer, Ishmael hedges his comment with standard remarks: 'there was a certain loftiness about the Pagan, which even his uncouthness could not altogether maim' (*M-D* 836). Not surprisingly, he assumes the 'white man teaching cannibal' role:

We then turned over the book together, and I endeavored to explain to him the purpose of the printing, and the meaning of the few pictures that were in it. Thus I soon engaged his interest ... (*M-D* 848)

This conventional elitism recalls Tommo and the narrator of *Omoo*, as do Ishmael's comments about Fedallah's boat crew:

Less swart in aspect, the companions of this figure were of that vivid, tiger-yellow complexion peculiar to some of the aboriginal natives of the Manillas; - a race notorious for a certain diabolism of subtilty, and by some of the honest white mariners supposed to be the paid spies and secret confidential agents on the water of the devil, their lord, whose counting-room they suppose to be elsewhere. (*M-D* 1024)

This could almost be a Pacific missionary speaking. The sense of recoil parallels that of the first missionaries to the Marquesas, who were frightened that failure would: "give infidels occasion to say the Gospel is not equal to the work of taming the rude savage of Nukuheva & Satan will exult when he finds he is left unmolested in his old dominions".<sup>10</sup> In this passage, then, Ishmael is representing the racist views of the Protestant West.

Finally, as well as voice and attitudes, Ishmael shows his elitism in the way that he composes his narrative, proving that his frequent comic self-deflation is only a sham. Ishmael himself indicates that his

narrative, like those of Melville's previous narrators, is a composite creation, and lists some of his sources: 'Owen; Scoresby; Beale; Bennett; J.Ross Browne ... Olmsted; and the Rev.Henry T.Cheever' (M-D 934). He even quotes from them openly: "'No branch of Zoology is so much involved as that which is entitled Cetology," says Captain Scoresby, A.D. 1820' (M-D 933). Yet these sources, as they are also the repositories of conventional class-bound attitudes, thereby betray Ishmael's own prejudices.

It is striking that in addition to anatomising the processes of whaling, almost all the authors Ishmael uses also set their descriptions in the context of typical travel narratives, appending conventional 'categorisation' and 'situation' to their scientific findings, and so acting as representative nineteenth-century elitist narrators. For instance, Olmsted in his *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage* (1841), like the authors of the travels considered above, investigates not just whaling, but also the lives and manners of Pacific islanders. He draws the usual conclusions:

Among the varied horrors connected with the former system of idolatry, there is none of so revolting a character or which so clearly exhibits the extreme degradation of the people, as the *tabu* system, a consecration of some particular object by the priests and the chiefs, the violation of which subjected the offenders to death.'

His text is full of patriotic effusion for America, 'my own favored country', and romantic apostrophes to the beauty of the ('uninhabited') landscape:

After the sun had set beyond the mountain peaks of Eimeo, and the fair moon,  
    'Apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light,  
    And o'er the dark her silvery mantle threw'  
a scene of enchantment burst upon the view, such as one's early imagination may have pictured to himself, while roaming in fancy to the fairy isles of the Pacific.

Similarly, Cheever writes his *The Whaleman's Adventures in the Southern Ocean* (1850) from a position of entrenched Christianity that surrounds his description of whaling with comments such as this:



It is THE BOOK [the Bible] which has brought it to pass, that the adventurous, weary whaler can now traverse the entire Pacific, and land with impunity at most of its lovely islands, and be supplied on terms of equity with all he needs.<sup>12</sup>

Again, Browne, while vividly portraying the life of the whaler, includes typical commentary in his *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* (1846):

It was some consolation to look forward to the primitive simplicity of a people untarnished with the inordinate love of gain - content with the rewards of labor, and virtuous even in their rudeness and ignorance.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, although he claims to be interested in seamen's welfare, he is still recognised as class-biassed by the rest of the crew, especially when the men feel they must mutiny over the poor conditions. Hence his suggestion that all were great friends is no more than rhetorical display:

'Give way! give way, my hearties!' cried P., pulling his weight against the aft oar. 'Do you love gin? A bottle of gin to the best man! Oh, pile it on while you have breath! pile it on!'

His book (which records his refusal to join with the men's protest) clearly demonstrates his own social allegiances, which are maintained even when under pressure. Bennett, likewise, is typically elitist, and describes the inhabitants of the Marquesas, whom his ship visits, as 'irascible, revengeful, and sensual'.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps only the Englishman Beale tempers his conventional encomium on the advantages of civilisation with a perceptive awareness of the dangers of Western colonization, saying that the Spanish in Peru:

Destroyed their liberty, robbed them of their homes, their wealth, and the land of their birth, caused them to obey the most obnoxious and tyrannical laws, and at last crowning the direful catalogue of crimes which stain the annals of that conquest, by the murder of 'Tupac Amari, the last king of the Children of the Sun'.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, he is here motivated more by anti-Spanish sentiment than cultural tolerance; he is uniformly adulatory about the achievements of Captain Cook.

Each of these books, which as H.P.Vincent shows Ishmael uses throughout his narrative, is consistently elitist; even whaling texts record the prerogatives and projects of the dominant Western classes.<sup>16</sup> There is no disjunction between their description of whales and whaling and their other concerns; they are seamless conventional productions.

This is, then, to assess Ishmael's class-affiliation according to the criteria that I have been employing throughout the thesis: I have focussed on the narrator's sense of his audience and on the attitudes that this encourages him to display. The suggestion is that Melville's narrators write 'for' a specific audience, and that their rhetoric and compositional process demonstrate this fact. I am not alone in holding such views. James Duban, for instance, similarly assesses Ishmael, describing him as 'a conceptual accessory to his country's ruthless expansionism'.<sup>17</sup> By this, Duban means that Ishmael's racism and paternalism to Queequeg (which he illustrates), and his accession to Ahab's (apparently) nationalistic quest, affiliate him to the Manifest Destiny nationalism which was to destroy ante-bellum America. For Duban, Ishmael's comments therefore articulate the views of that class which was pushing the U.S.A. towards conflict (although he absolves the narrator from 'blame' in saying that he was only a complicit pawn, not the driving force itself).

Such an attribution of 'function' to Ishmael, rather than of 'rounded characterliness' seems to be the direction of recent criticism. I stress the narrator's role as being the representative in the text of the novel-reading elite class, which is to be harsher on Ishmael than Duban, but this seems to accord with Melville's compositional strategy as I understand it. Other commentators emphasise Ishmael's function as being an exemplification of the way that rhetoric was used in the contemporary U.S.

to 'persuade' people to conform to a particular world-view. Donald Pease argues thus, in proposing Ishmael as an Emersonian propagandist.<sup>18</sup> In all these cases, the narrator is scrutinised for his function in the text, and in each case, his textual function is an aspect of the real political world in which the novel participates. The narrator bears ideological weight. This is even true in David Hirsch's essay 'The Dilemma of the Liberal Intellectual: Melville's Ishmael', which, by focussing on Ishmael's philosophy, suggests that he incarnates both 'the rational liberalism of the Enlightenment' and 'the Calvinist point of view'.<sup>19</sup> Hirsch feels that Ishmael embodies in the text the balancing-act between these two positions which characterised nineteenth-century educated U.S. society.

Hence, Ishmael is in every way as representative a figure as any of his predecessors. This imputed alliance between narrator and audience conditions the narrative. A. Robert Lee comments in an excellent essay: 'So Ishmael tries to bind himself to the reader. Narrator and reader become paired travellers, kinsmen in imagination'.<sup>20</sup> As I have indicated, I feel Ishmael intends to show that he is not just 'kinsman in imagination' with his reader, but the reader's proxy in the text, who is also guide, confidant, and spokesman. Yet as I shall show below, although he accepts this role, Ishmael is unable to carry it off with success for the class that he represents. And, Melville implies, if that class's literary propagandist is unable to do this, neither in reality should the class itself be able to do so.



## iv) The Town-Ho's Story

As a prelude to the general discussion of *Moby-Dick*, I shall consider 'The Town-Ho's Story', which Ishmael embeds in his larger narrative. This was published in advance of the novel, and has frequently been seen as an exemplification of the issues expressed in the full book. Alan Heimert, for example, reads the story as a commentary on splits within the Democratic party, so cohering with his wider symbolic/political analysis.<sup>21</sup> Because of Ishmael's representative function, I shall focus on the narrative voice and -and attitude that he exhibits, and the X circumstances of the story's relation, to see if these explain any features of *Moby-Dick* as a whole.

First, it is clear that Ishmael tells a story about the whaling industry to herald America's achievements in this sphere, and to commend his compatriots' devil-may-care money-making on the world's oceans:

'You must know that in a settled and civilized ocean like our Atlantic, for example, some skippers think little of pumping their whole way across it - Nor in the solitary and savage seas far from you to the westward, gentlemen, is it altogether unusual for ships to keep clanging at their pump-handles in full chorus even for a voyage of considerable length.' (*M-D* 1055)

He lovingly describes the huge American lakes, disparaging his Spanish hosts' maritime status in the process, referring to: "square-sail brigs and three-masted ships, well nigh as large and stout as any that ever sailed out of your old Callao to far Manilla" (*M-D* 1054). Again, his description of the Erie Canal (completed in 1825, and one of the mile-stones in American internal communications), is a celebration of U.S. technology:

'For three hundred and sixty miles, gentlemen, through the entire breadth of the state of New York; through numerous populous cities and most thriving villages; through long, dismal, uninhabited swamps, and affluent, cultivated fields, unrivalled for fertility - flows one continual stream of Venetianly

corrupt and often lawless life'. (*M-D* 1060)

This last comment is important, because it shows that Ishmael distinguishes between the common people who have to work the canal, whom he repudiates, and the construction itself, which is one of the "holiest vicinities" (*M-D* 1060). It parallels the narrator's consistent recoil from normal sailors in both 'The Town-Ho's Story' and *Moby-Dick*.

Hence Ishmael's story accords with his representative status, and affirms the role of the whaling industry and American nationalism and endeavour. He tells how because the *Town-Ho*, a whaler in the Pacific, is making water, she must leave the fishing grounds for shelter. On this journey, ribaldry at the expense of the mate, Radney, by a violent Canaller, Steerkilt, results in Steerkilt striking Radney, and the mate attempting to humiliate his inferior. Steerkilt refuses to obey, and organises a rebellion, but is eventually betrayed into the hands of the intransigent captain by his own treacherous men. Punished by Radney, Steerkilt nearly murders the mate, but is saved from this by the appearance of *Moby-Dick*, the white whale, in pursuit of which Radney is killed and eaten. When the *Town-Ho* eventually reaches land, the entire crew mutiny, forcing the captain to sail for reinforcements to Tahiti, on which journey he again meets Radney, who having threatened him, disappears.

This is the story that Ishmael tells, and it seems to endow the whale with some kind of Providential status: "Gentlemen, a strange fatality pervades the whole career of these events, as if verily mapped out before the world itself was charted" (*M-D* 1068). This, as much as Ishmael's nationalism, accords with his known representative character. As we have seen, Hirsch says Ishmael expresses typical Calvinist values.<sup>22</sup>

So Ishmael in 'The Town-Ho's Story' speaks as an American elitist

religionist. Although Steelkilt escapes, the ship is saved to continue whaling, and the only absolute victim is Radney. Although the mate clearly draws the narrator's scorn, his story cannot be seen as advocating the rights of sailors as against captains and owners. Rather, he wonders at - without challenging - the detrimental effect that maritime life has on once upright men:

'In sum, gentlemen, what the wildness of this canal life is, is emphatically evinced by this; that our wild whale-fishery contains so many of its most finished graduates, and that scarce any race of mankind, except Sydney men, are so much distrusted by our whaling captains. Nor does it at all diminish the curiousness of this matter, that to many thousands of our rural boys and young men born along its line, the probationary life of the Grand Canal furnishes the sole transition between quietly reaping in the Christian corn-field, and recklessly ploughing the waters of the most barbaric seas.' (*M-D* 1061)

Yet, despite its seeming conventionality, Ishmael's story hints at more than it tells, and in probing the inconsistencies of the narration, we can begin to discover its motivation.

Three things are important in this context: the echoes which Ishmael's half-uttered images generate; the situation in which he delivers his story; and the solicitude with which he woos his audience.

By invoking the whale as Providence, Ishmael sensitizes his readers to other images that he employs. For instance, Steelkilt's punishment must be reminiscent of Calvary, with him playing the part of Christ: "he applied it with all his might to the backs of the two traitors, till they yelled for no more, but lifelessly hung their heads sideways, as the two crucified thieves are drawn" (*M-D* 1065). This impression is soon reinforced: "Steelkilt calculated his time, and found that his next trick at the helm would come round at two o'clock, in the morning of the third day from that in which he had been betrayed" (*M-D* 1067). But is Ishmael aware of the



implications of his images, for he has previously described Steerkilt as a violent reprobate? Moreover, Steerkilt's behaviour when trussed up reminds us of Satan as the serpent in Paradise, not of Jesus on the cross:

"What I say is this - and mind it well - if you flog me, I murder you!"  
"Say ye so? then see how you frighten me" - and the Captain drew off with the rope to strike.  
"Best not," hissed the Laker.  
"But I must," - and the rope was once more drawn back for the stroke.  
"Steerkilt here hissed out something, inaudible to all but the Captain - and then suddenly throwing down his rope, said, 'I won't do it.'" (M-D 1065-6)

Is Steerkilt Christ, and is he leagued with the whale, or is he Satan - and then what of the whale? Ishmael's imagery is confused. He has created a symbolic frame of reference for his story, and has then undermined it.

A similar disorder surrounds the recital itself. This Protestant apologist delights to tell his story about the American national industry in an aristocratic gathering in Lima, Peru. But as his auditors say, the very place Lima signifies all that Ishmael should have repudiated. Here is Catholicism, the Inquisition, alcoholism, and gambling, all set in the faded splendour of the old Spanish royal empire:

"Oh! do not bow and look surprised; you know the proverb all along this coast - 'Corrupt as Lima.' It but bears out your saying, too; churches more plentiful than billiard-tables, and for ever open - and 'Corrupt as Lima.' So, too, Venice; I have been there; the holy city of the blessed evangelist, St. Mark! - St. Dominic, purge it! Your cup! Thanks; here I refill; now, you pour out again." (M-D 1060)

It is, however, the auditors who try to dissuade Ishmael from his more excessive demonstrations, not the narrator who recoils; and they ultimately fail, for he swears on the gospels, in the presence of a priest, that his story is the truth. What are we to make of this performance, especially with the knowledge that in the later *Benito Cereno* (1855) Lima is again the place where an American elitist figure falls under the spell of the ineffective, supposedly out-moded, Spanish empire? Is Lima for Melville a

place in which the flaws of American pretension are exposed? If so, Ishmael's incoherent story-telling contributes to such a project.<sup>23</sup>

And yet, one of the most striking features of the narrator's telling is that he coaxes his audience. Frequently, he interrupts a paragraph to assure himself of his auditors' attention: "In sum gentlemen", "I left off, gentlemen" (*M-D* 1061). He is unfailingly polite to them, filling them in with incidental details, such as about Moby Dick; and he never once loses his temper: "No need, gentlemen; one moment, and I proceed. - Now, gentlemen" (*M-D* 1068). This is all because he is determined that they will believe what he says, setting up the afore-mentioned auto-da-fe to prove himself: "Excuse me for running after you, Don Sebastian; but may I also beg that you will be particular in procuring the largest sized Evangelists you can" (*M-D* 1071). So, if Ishmael's story is confused, he has nevertheless resolved that its confusion will be disguised, and that his relation will be vindicated. What are we to make of this evidence?

I suggest that these three aspects of Ishmael's story - its flawed imagery, its peculiar setting, and its audience-attentiveness - all indicate that the narration is proceeding with the intention of disguising some kind of half-acknowledged compulsion. There is in Ishmael's 'Town-Ho's Story' a suppressed, almost an unconscious, alternative 'Town-Ho's Story'. His act of relation invigorates precisely what he wishes to deny. This is attested in the stridency with which he tries in vain to vindicate himself:

"So help me Heaven, and on my honor, the story I have told ye, gentlemen, is in substance and its great items, true. I know it to be true; it happened on this ball; I trod the ship; I knew the crew; I have seen and talked with Steelkilt since the death of Radney." (*M-D* 1072)

How could Ishmael have spoken with Steelkilt if he himself says he went to

France and then disappeared: "Where Steerkilt now is, gentlemen, none know" (M-D 1071). If he met him personally, why does he not tell us about this too?

Precisely what this 'unconscious' is in 'The Town-Ho's Story', we must speculate. Bearing in mind Ishmael's representative function, and the kind of attitudes that he expresses in the story itself, I would suggest that he must be fascinated by the speed with which a ship that is no more handicapped than hundreds of others could rapidly degenerate into disorder. However, it is not the mutiny which triggers Ishmael's horror, for as he shows, this was easily controlled; rather the intervention of the whale. X Using his imagery, Ishmael attempts to suggest that the "predestinated mate" (M-D 1059) is the focus of the avenging whale's wrath: "But the whale rushed round in a sudden maelstrom; seized the swimmer between his jaws; and rearing high up with him, plunged headlong again, and went down" (M-D 1069). This, apparently, is what Moby Dick had been waiting for. But Ishmael's imagery is flawed, and also deceptive, for it should be noticed that Moby Dick is inert until called into action by the cry "There she rolls!" (M-D 1068). In other words, this putative avenger strikes only when it hears the call of the whaling industry to turn it into profitable product at the hands of: "captain, mates, and harpooneers, who ... were all anxious to capture so famous and precious a fish" (M-D 1068). In this light, Radney is a simple victim of the industry he serves, who dies as so many other men did by being fouled in its machinery, and it is Ishmael's rhetoric that attempts to cloak events in fatalistic mystery.

My argument, therefore, is that it is the knowledge of Moby Dick's critical intervention in the life of an American whaler that Ishmael's 'Town-Ho's Story' is trying to expunge. By speaking as if events were



'fated' he attempts to annexe the whale to his own signifying system, and so neutralise the threat that Moby implies to industry and commerce; it is 'only' an animal. Yet 'the appalling beauty of the vast milky mass' (*M-D* 1068) has so impressed itself on Ishmael that despite himself he cannot succeed in this project. Nevertheless, he also cannot prevent himself from repeatedly telling his story, in the attempt to suppress his knowledge. As he says, "For my humor's sake, I shall preserve the style in which I once narrated it at Lima" (*M-D* 1053), so he obviously delivered it in many other ways in different places.

Thus 'The Town-Ho's Story', as related by one Ishmael, appeared in 1851, to be closely followed by one *Moby-Dick*, also related by one Ishmael, later in the year. The second story follows the same pattern as the first, only it is far more extensive. Both of them are motivated by more than they wish to say; and in speculating about this motivation, we release Melville's own involvement in the texts.

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v) Ishmael's Second Narrative - *The Pequod*

The significant components of Ishmael's first Moby Dick tale 'The Town-Ho's Story', were analysed as: the narrator himself; the ship, the various sailors, and the whale. Each of these presences has a specific function within the narrative. I have suggested Ishmael's is to suggest that the whale is no more than a supernatural 'avenger', who providentially destroys the 'villain' Radney. The whale's threat is supposedly only to

Radney; the *Town-Ho* is left intact. As my taxonomy in section ii) implies, Ishmael employs a similar technique in his second Moby Dick tale.

In accordance with his elitist representative function, Ishmael again undertakes to celebrate America's greatest industry. He begins by describing New Bedford, one of the premier whaling ports:

Nowhere in all America will you find more patrician-like houses; parks and gardens more opulent, than in New Bedford. Whence came they? how planted upon this once scraggy scoria of a country?

Go and gaze upon the iron emblematical harpoons round yonder lofty mansion, and your question will be answered, (M-D 828)

He next praises the exploits of Nantucket, another principal whaling port, ironically analogising these enterprises with those of Southern slaveholders:

For the sea is his; he owns it, as Emperors own empires; other seamen having but a right of way through it. Merchant ships are but extension bridges; armed ones but floating forts. The Nantucketer, he alone resides and rests on the sea; he alone, in Bible language, goes down to it in ships; to and fro ploughing it as his own special plantation, (M-D 861)

But the central symbol of the industry is the *Pequod* herself:

She was a ship of the old school, rather small if anything; with an old-fashioned claw-footed look about her. Long seasoned and weather-stained in the typhoons and calms of all four oceans, (M-D 867)

The *Pequod* is the scene for all Ishmael's later descriptions of killing and processing the whale; she is the stage for his exaltation of 'the honor and glory of whaling'.

However, while he celebrates it, Ishmael also acknowledges whaling's underside. He says of New Bedford that: 'The town itself is perhaps the dearest place to live in all New England. It is a land of oil, true enough: but not like Canaan' (M-D 828). Similarly, he accepts the macabre nature of the *Pequod*:

She was apparelled like any barbaric Ethiopian emperor, his neck heavy with pendants of polished ivory. She was a thing of trophies. A cannibal of a

craft, tricking herself forth in the chased bones of her enemies. All round, her unpanelled, open bulwarks were garnished like one continuous jaw, with the long sharp teeth of the sperm whale, (M-D 868)

This negative aspect is most obvious when he describes the operation of the 'try-works', huge ovens which heat the blubber to extract the oil:

By midnight the works were in full operation, We were clear from the carcase; sail had been made; the wind was freshening; the wild ocean darkness was intense. But that darkness was licked up by the fierce flames, which at intervals forked forth from the sooty flues, and illuminated every lofty rope in the rigging, as with the famed Greek fire, (M-D 1245)

These, which he tells us are unique to American whalers, fully demonstrate that the *Pequod* is a factory at sea; the maritime counterpart of the Lowell mills and Pennsylvania mines. Ishmael is appalled;

Nothing seemed before me but a jet gloom, now and then made ghastly by flashes of redness. Uppermost was the impression, that whatever swift, rushing thing I stood on was not so much bound to any haven ahead as rushing from all havens astern, (M-D 1247)

Yet although he is appalled, he still writes a narrative that eulogises the whaling industry:

The more I dive into this matter of whaling, and push my researches up to the very spring-head of it, so much the more am I impressed with its great honorableness and antiquity; and especially when I find so many great demi-gods and heroes, prophets of all sorts, who one way or other have shed distinction upon it, I am transported with the reflection that I myself belong, though but subordinately, to so emblazoned a fraternity, (M-D 1180)

So while Ishmael knows the horrors of capitalism as figured in whaling, he refuses to denounce them fully. On the contrary, approximately a third of his narrative is graphic, loving descriptions, of every piece of equipment that is used to capture the whales. He even offers owners hints as to how to improve efficiency:

Now, I care not who maintains the contrary, but all this is both foolish and unnecessary. The headsman should stay in the bows from first to last; he should both dart the harpoon and the lance, and no rowing whatever should be expected of him, except under circumstances obvious to any fisherman. I know that this would sometimes involve a slight loss of speed in the chase; but long experience in various whalemens of more than one nation has convinced me



that in the vast majority of failures in the fishery, it has not by any means been so much the speed of the whale as the before described exhaustion of the harpooneer that has caused them, (M-D 1101)

Thus he comments of the *Pequod*: 'A noble craft, but somehow a most melancholy! All noble things are touched with that' (M-D 868), which recalls White-Jacket's 'But we are all Fatalists at bottom' (W-J 482), and reminds us that Ishmael's attitude is heavily determined by the representative function that he must play. He cannot simply denounce the whaling industry. This would have been disloyal to his function.

For Ishmael, the *Pequod* signifies the whaling industry, an industry which he knows he must celebrate, but which he knows is in essence horrific. This knowledge is what distinguishes the second tale from 'The Town-Ho's Story', where the *Town-Ho* is an unproblematic presence. Ishmael, as he writes later, must somehow 'manage' his misgivings about the industry whose novel-reading owners he is writing for. In his new narrative there are two linked things to suppress: the real nature of the whaling industry, and the recalcitrant whale which in refusing to be caught subverts Ishmael's whaling paeon, and express that real nature.

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vi) Ishmael's second narrative: Ahab

Ishmael first attempts to 'manage' this challenge by suggesting that the *Pequod*'s accepted role, to catch and process whales, is hi-jacked by her monomaniac captain, Ahab. Ishmael attributes a manic quest to Ahab,

suggesting that the old man sails with the sole purpose of revenging himself on Moby Dick, who had eaten his leg on a previous voyage. If Ishmael can successfully suggest that Ahab's 'quest' is a distortion of the *Pequod's* function, he will have safe-guarded the industry.

The comment 'the rushing *Pequod*, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul' (*M-D* 1246) asserts in Ishmael's view that Ahab has commandeered his ship for an illicit purpose. The *Pequod*, he claims, is subject to 'that certain sultanism ... [which] ... became incarnate in an irresistible dictatorship' (*M-D* 948). When Ahab destroys his quadrant in a fit of rage, this is seen by Ishmael as showing his 'insanity' and he then apparently also says farewell to his 'humanity' in defying the elements in the storm:

'Oh, oh! Yet blindfold, yet will I talk to thee. Light though thou be, thou leapest out of darkness; but I am darkness leaping out of light, leaping out of thee! The javelins cease; open eyes; see, or not? There burn the flames! Oh, thou magnanimous! now do I glory in my genealogy. But thou art but my fiery father; my sweet mother, I know not. Oh, cruel, what hast thou done with her? (*M-D* 1334)

Moreover, Ishmael carefully juxtaposes this image of Ahab with the resistant 'normality' of the mate, Starbuck:

'I am game for his crooked jaw, and for the jaws of Death too, Captain Ahab, if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow; but I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance. How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab? It will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market. (*M-D* 966)

Here Starbuck voices the 'rational' position which Ishmael represents, and in contrast to which Ahab is depicted as insane as he drinks his blasphemous pledge with his harpooners. To accept this stage-play presentation at face value, however, is to underestimate Ishmael, and to



fall dupe to his strategem, for Ahab is a different character from the one Ishmael allows him to be here.

Ahab is so heavily discussed by Ishmael before he is met in the narrative that once he does appear, it is difficult for the reader to resist Ishmael's assessment. As described by captains Bildad and Peleg, Ahab is immediately portrayed as a distinctly alarming figure:

He's a grand, ungodly, god-like man, Captain Ahab; doesn't speak much; but, when he does speak, then you may well listen. Mark ye, be forewarned, Ahab's above the common. (M-D 878)

Then the 'prophet' Elijah adds his contributions:

'Morning to ye! morning to ye!' he rejoined, again moving off. 'Oh! I was going to warn ye against - but never mind, never mind - it's all one, all in the family too; - sharp frost this morning, ain't it? Good bye to ye. Shan't see ye very soon, I guess; unless it's before the Grand Jury.' And with these cracked words he finally departed, leaving me, for the moment, in no small wonderment at his frantic impudence. (M-D 898)

Together, these encounters allow Ishmael a riot of speculation, which culminates in his Chapter 28 musings:

Every time I ascended to the deck from my watches below, I instantly gazed aft to mark if any strange face were visible; for my first vague disquietude touching the unknown captain, now in the seclusion of the sea, became almost a perturbation. This was strangely heightened at times by the ragged Elijah's diabolical incoherences uninvitedly recurring to me, with a subtle energy I could not have before conceived of. (M-D 923)

He is then prepared to disclose Ahab:

It was one of those less lowering, but still gray and gloomy enough mornings of the transition, when with a fair wind the ship was rushing through the water with a vindictive sort of leaping and melancholy rapidity, that as I mounted to the deck at the call of the forenoon watch, so soon as I levelled my glance towards the taffrail, foreboding shivers ran over me. Reality outran apprehension; Captain Ahab stood upon his quarter-deck, (M-D 924)

And so Ahab, the 'sultan' and 'Emir' as Ishmael elsewhere calls him (M-D 950), is eventually introduced to the reader - the long preparation, and the description of the captain once he has appeared, seeming to substantiate Ishmael's contentions:



There seemed to be no sign of common bodily illness about him, nor of the recovery from any. He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness. His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus. (M-D 924)

Yet Ishmael's presentation of Ahab is highly artful; he closely follows the tactics of other Melville narrators. Like White-Jacket, for instance, he describes the *Pequod's* crew in two chapters entitled 'Knights and Squires', in such a way that he 'situates' and 'categorises' the various mates and harpooners:

Starbuck was no crusader after perils; in him courage was not a sentiment; but a thing simply useful to him, and always at hand upon all mortally practical occasions. (M-D 915)

By immediately following these chapters with the one titled 'Ahab', Ishmael can seem to suggest that he here offers only more judicious description of life aboard the *Pequod*. For the reader who has become alerted to Melville's narrators' tactics, however, this is suspicious. Ishmael's presentation of Ahab is not as fair as he claims it to be; he literally has no right to define Ahab as he does, because he has no evidence for his assertions other than hearsay and his own imagination. For instance, although it looks convincing, his remarks on Ahab's scar are conjecture; it is Ishmael's language that makes Ahab seem terrifying, not his demeanour:

Threading its way out from among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish. It resembled that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, lofty trunk of a great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded. (M-D 924 my emphasis)

Thus Ahab is subjected to judicious 'presentation'; the introductory series of rumours, like the chapter 'Ahab' itself, make a case about him, designed to accord with the subsequent 'demonstration' of his madness considered above. By closely attending to Ishmael's narrative (and by

employing the analogy of Melville's previous narrators), it is possible to discern this tactic. Indeed, Ishmael himself sometimes inadvertently reveals the nature of his narrative construction: 'Unwittingly here a secret has been divulged, which perhaps might more properly, in set way, have been disclosed before' (*M-D* 1289). Here he admits that he must guard what he says to prevent the captain assuming a reality beyond his strict control. Although Ishmael supposedly tells us about Ahab's 'arts and entrenchments' (*M-D* 949), he thereby indicates his own:

For be a man's intellectual superiority what it will, it can never assume the practical, available supremacy over other men, without the aid of some sort of external arts and entrenchments, always, in themselves, more or less paltry and base, (*M-D* 948-9)

So in his treatment of Ahab, Ishmael is a typical Melville narrator, who shapes and moulds his narrative to accord not with 'truth', but to express what he wants it to.

Again, as in deceiving commentators about himself; Ishmael seems successfully to have 'presented' Ahab, for he has been accepted as mad, and the *Pequod's* 'quest' has become a commonplace of critical discussion. This is perhaps because the narrator substantiates his portrayal by enlisting the aid of Shakespearian characters, such as Lear. The mad king's defiance on the heath is taken to be paralleled by the mad captain's defiance in 'The Candles'. The various 'soliloquies', dramatic passages, and stage directions likewise promote the association of the narrative with the Elizabethan dramatist. As L.W.Levine shows, this is a nicely judged move by Ishmael; the contemporary American audience was very interested in Shakespeare, and would have been quick to accept any proffered analogies. Consequently, many modern critics, such as Charles Olsen, or F.O.Matthiessen have also explored the seeming similarity.<sup>24</sup> But in doing so, all these



people have ignored the way that the narrator consciously shapes his narrative and places his characters.

Once we attend to this strategy, we are enabled to hear Ahab's own voice, as it at times eludes Ishmael's hegemony, and this tells a different story from the narrator's. Ahab's soliloquy after 'The quarter-deck', in which he inaugurates his 'quest' is here crucial, for he denies that he is mad in the way that Ishmael proposes he is. On the contrary, Ahab suggests that he has been made 'mad', because he has been invaded by the fiend of industrial capitalism:

'What I've dared, I've willed; and what I've willed, I'll do! They think me mad - Starbuck does; but I'm demoniac, I am madness maddened! (M-D 971)

Here the vital word is 'demoniac', which literally means 'possessed by a demon or evil spirit' - it does not mean that someone is insane. This recalls his earlier comment about the 'Iron Crown of Lombardy' whose: 'jagged edge galls me so, my brain seems to beat against the solid metal' (M-D 971). This image suggests someone trapped and oppressed by iron, the symbol of the new machine age, and so proposes Ahab as having been maddened by his involvement in the whaling industry. This insight coheres with the captain's late speeches to Starbuck, whom Ishmael has previously ironically tried to use as a foil to set against him:

'Oh, Starbuck! it is a mild, mild wind, and a mild looking sky. On such a day - very much such a sweetness as this - I struck my first whale - a boy-harpooneer of eighteen! Forty - forty - forty years ago! - ago! Forty years of continual whaling! forty years of privation, and peril, and storm-time! forty years on the pitiless sea! (M-D 1373)

As Ahab now explains, everything he is has been determined by the industry which he served. Although Ishmael repeatedly asserts that Ahab dominates the Pequod, it is actually the case that the Pequod, and the nineteenth-century mechanical America that it symbolises, have dominated Ahab. They



have eventually possessed him, so that if we find Ahab terrifying, then so should that industry itself be seen as terrifying:

When I think of this life I have led; the desolation of solitude it has been; the masoned, walled-town of a Captain's exclusiveness, which admits but small entrance to any sympathy from the green country without - oh, weariness! heaviness! ... Why this strife of the chase? why weary, and palsy the arm at the oar, and the iron, and the lance? how the richer or better is Ahab now? (M-D 1374)

Ahab is the victim of *Moby-Dick*, for in doing his job, he has had his humanity destroyed. It is this that Ishmael tries to deny by suggesting that he is mad. The concept of the metaphysical 'quest' is developed to obscure the fact that Ahab directs his revenge towards the animal which has injured him, and which is the object of the industry that has invaded his life. Ahab's situation is like the workers in Melville's later story *The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids* (1855), who have similarly had their humanity destroyed by the industry they are forced to tend; it is just that he has been able to retain his anger:

At rows of blank-looking counters sat rows of blank-looking girls, with blank, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper.

In one corner stood some huge frame of ponderous iron, with a vertical thing like a piston periodically rising and falling upon a heavy wooden block. Before it - its tame minister - stood a tall girl, feeding the iron animal with half-quires of rose-hued note paper, (*Uncollected Tales* p. 1270)

By showing that Ishmael's false presentation of Ahab can be disclosed, Ishmael's attempt to safe-guard the integrity of the whaling industry collapses. It is not the case that Ahab appropriates the symbolic *Pequod* for a supernatural quest, for while he does hunt Moby Dick, he does so only because the industry itself forced him to. This is the irony; the guilt is the industry's, and the class of people who profit by it bring the cataclysm on their own heads. Ishmael's first attempt at narrative 'management' breaks down. So does his second.

## vii) Ishmael's Second Narrative: Moby Dick

It will be remembered that in 'The Town-Ho's Story' I suggested it was Ishmael's investment of Moby Dick with 'Providential' imagery which first alerted me to the inconsistencies of his narrative, and that Ishmael did this to suppress the knowledge that the whale attacked the *Town-Ho* when threatened with capture. In 'The Town-Ho's Story' Moby Dick triggered Ishmael's narrative deception. This is also true of his second whaling tale.

In his new narrative, Ishmael first attempts to deal with Moby Dick in 'The Whiteness of the Whale'. Although he speaks about the white whale in the preceding chapter, this is only in relation to Ahab, and forms part of his attempt to portray the captain as mad. The strategy that Ishmael deploys in 'The Whiteness of the Whale' imitates the one that he used against Ahab; he attempts to invest Moby Dick with certain properties and qualities that obscure his real nature, most typically, by arguing that the whale's peculiar colour causes him a kind of spiritual dread. Beginning with the acknowledgment that white is traditionally seen as a colour of purity, he then suggests for an avenging whale to be white is to reverse the usual signification system in a perversion of reality:

This elusive quality it is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds. Witness the white bear of the poles, and the white shark of the tropics; what but their smooth, flaky whiteness makes them the transcendent horrors they are? That ghastly whiteness it is which imparts such an abhorrent mildness, even more loathsome than terrific, to the dumb gloating of their aspect, (*M-D* 994)

After development and a rhetorical climax, he finally proclaims: 'And of all these things, the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the



fiery hunt?' (M-D 1001).

Yet as before, analysis of Ishmael's arguments reveals more about himself than about Moby Dick. None of the comments in this chapter actually refer to the white whale at all; they are concerned with the white elephant, the white dog, the white steed (all mythological animals, unlike Moby Dick who actually exists), or with white buildings and mountains (whose colour marks them out from the usual). Hence Ishmael again merely asserts an analogy between these and the avenging whale. He is tugging at the web of associations from which we tend to construct our world. He is again 'making a case', with his chapter a rhetorical display that is designed to make the reader agree with him, without providing sufficient space in which to assess his contentions. Thus he builds his argument powerfully, moving swiftly from example to example, until he concludes with a series of questions:

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colours; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows - a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink?  
(M-D 1001)

These questions, together with the shift to direct address quoted above, are targeted to activate the consciences of readers used to the harangues of religious pamphleteers. When we read them, Ishmael intends to convict us and carry his case, just as the pamphleteers intend to convert us and carry theirs: 'Reader, whose yoke do you wear? Either Satan's or Christ's' - WHICH?<sup>25</sup> Their obvious manipulation corresponds with the very self-conscious way in which Ishmael constructs his chapter as a whole, filling it with numbered points, footnotes, and frequent apostrophes:



But thou sayest, methinks this white-lead chapter about whiteness is but a white flag hung out from a craven soul; thou surrenderest to a hypo, Ishmael.

Tell me, why this strong young colt, far removed from all the beasts of prey ... why will he start, snort, and with bursting eyes paw the ground in phrensies of affright? (M-D 1000)

This is not to claim that Ishmael is uninterested in the whale as he writes (it clearly informs his entire commentary), but to argue that what he writes bears no relation to Moby Dick's actual status. On the contrary, Ishmael's rhetorical display is designed to disguise that status.

'The Whiteness of Whale' hopes to fix Moby Dick as an alarming alien presence in the reader's mind that Ishmael can then periodically and easily invoke, as when he speaks of the 'Spirit-spout': 'Lit up by the moon, it looked celestial; seemed some plumed and glittering god uprising from the sea' (M-D 1041). Consequently, when Moby Dick is at last himself seen, we are meant not to disagree with Ishmael's attribution:

A gentle joyousness - a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested the gliding whale. Not the white bull Jupiter swimming away with ravished Europa clinging to his graceful horns; his lovely, leering eyes sideways intent upon the maid; with smooth bewitching fleetness, rippling straight for the nuptial bower in Crete; not Jove, not that great majesty Supreme! did surpass the glorified White Whale as he so divinely swam. (M-D 1379)

Ishmael intends this consummation of his <sup>presented as</sup> irrefutably to establish Moby Dick as a supernatural presence. It supports the 'strange fatality' (M-D 1068) of 'The Town-Ho's Story' with a supposedly unassailable impression of deity. - But it is all show. Ishmael has cunningly created his 'monster-whale' from a tissue of allusions by exploiting the coercive possibilities of his narrative. If we accept that Moby Dick is a god we have been gulled as thoroughly as if we accept Ahab as 'simply' insane.

## viii) Ishmael's Second Narrative: Summary

Ishmael therefore tells his story in *Moby-Dick* to suggest that an insane captain pursues a supernatural whale, and that the resultant loss of the ship is caused by the clash of the two. This glosses over his own involvement in shaping the narrative so that it fits this scheme, and hence the fact that both Ahab and Moby Dick are in many respects the victims of *The Pequod* and its celebrating narrator.

By noticing the way in which Ishmael writes, we can reveal the motivation which he attempts to hide. As I commented, A. Robert Lee's essay 'The Tale and the Telling' exemplifies the control that Ishmael exerts over his narrative, and his anxiety to convince his reader of his honesty:

Ishmael cajoles, lectures, asks approval and sanction. Whether the tone is breezy, or rueful, or mischievous, he asks - this, or this, is so, isn't it? He tries, almost always, to invite sympathy for his difficulties in telling the tale. In 'The Whiteness of the Whale', he sounds almost plaintive: "But how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught." (M-D 993)<sup>26</sup>

This solicitude, which I have suggested is the characteristic procedure of the representative Melville narrator, is noticed by only those few critics who are sceptical of Ishmael's narrative project. It is, however, fundamental to his strategy. In drawing attention to this quotation, Lee has exposed one of the central points that Ishmael wishes to deny, that just as in 'The Town-Ho's Story', he writes with a sense of compulsion, and that his narrative betrays the marks of his difficulty.

This compulsion is attested not only in 'The Whiteness of the Whale', but at the very beginning too. Although he tries to appeal to the reader's sense of adventure as a justification for his embarkation (sounding alarmingly like Taji), Ishmael's chronology is deceptive. When he



first left New York for the whaling ports, he could not have been motivated in precisely the way that he says he was:

By reason of these things, then, the whaling voyage was welcome; the great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open, and in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost soul, endless processions of the whale, and, midmost of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air, (*M-D* 800)

Ishmael could only have had the 'conceit' of Moby Dick after his voyage on the *Pequod*. Its inclusion here at the later time when he was producing his narrative is the first hint that the whale has had some determinate influence on the narrator; which he immediately tries to control by suggesting that Moby Dick is a 'supernatural' beast. From this point on the sensitive reader can be aware of Ishmael's attempt to shape his narrative so as to neutralise the threat of the white whale.

I shall return to the chronology of Ishmael's narrative production, but it is important to recognise the pervasiveness of his desire to problematise the *Pequod*'s sinking. Even when he is in the water, the sharks 'glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths' (*M-D* 1408), and the final catastrophe is shrouded with implied abnormality that recalls the 'fatalism' of 'Loomings':

A sky-hawk that tauntingly had followed the main-truck downwards from its natural home among the stars, pecking at the flag, and incommoding Tashtego there; this bird now chanced to intercept its broad fluttering wing between the hammer and the wood; and simultaneously feeling that etherial thrill, the submerged savage beneath, in his death-grasp, kept his hammer frozen there; and so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which, like Satan, would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it, (*M-D* 1407)

This concatenation of heavenly and hellish imagery is designed to substantiate Ishmael's consistent 'mythical' portrayal of Ahab and the whale, and has provided fruitful ground for the speculations of critics.



But in accepting Ishmael's explanation, these people overlook the equal possibility that the *Pequod* is sunk not because it is Ahab's 'chariot' but because it is a capitalist machine that is designed to kill whales:

From the ship's bows, nearly all the seamen now hung inactive; hammers, bits of plank, lances, and harpoons, mechanically retained in their hands, just as they had darted from their various employments; all their enchanted eyes intent upon the whale, which from side to side strangely vibrating his predestinating head, sent a broad band of overspreading semicircular foam before him as he rushed. Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled. Some fell flat upon their faces. Like dislodged trucks, the heads of the harpooneers aloft shook on their bull-like necks. Through the breach, they heard the waters pour, as mountain torrents down a flume. (M-D 1405)

Here again Ishmael tries to deceive with his comment about the 'predestinating head', but it is the image of the machine that has been forced to suspend operation that is crucial. It is this - the silencing of the wheels of industry - that Ishmael the elitist narrator tries to conceal. And as the sea breaks in, the whale, which again had only attacked once it had been provoked, strikes back at all the projects of the nineteenth-century 'industrial revolution'. Moby Dick's is not some kind of statement about the power of 'Nature', but an instinctive response to the degradations levelled by the dominant classes in the name of 'Progress'. Ironically, the effect of Moby Dick's action is the same as that of Ahab's struggle, for he who has been driven mad by the industry he served, in pursuing the whale inevitably wrecks his ship. Ahab is aware of the consequences implied for the U.S. "The ship! The hearse! ... its wood could only be American" (M-D 1405), but he does not duck them:

'All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event - in the living act, the undoubted dead - there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength,

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with an inscrutable malice sinewing it.' (M-D 967)

The point is that whale and captain jointly contribute to the *Pequod's* destruction. Thus the question that must be faced by any audience is whether we realise the significance of this event, or whether Ishmael achieves his end? Do we accept his version of the story, or are we suspicious of it? Clearly, I am suspicious, and before making some final comments, I shall add a few more reasons why.

These again centre around the way in which Ishmael constructs his narrative. His loquacity and humour, which are sometimes taken as evidence of his naivety, are on the contrary designed to involve his reader and eliminate dissent:

But why pester one with all this reasoning on the subject? Speak out! You have seen him spout; then declare what the spout is; can you not tell water from air? My dear sir, in this world it is not so easy to settle these plain things. I have ever found your plain things the most knottiest of all. And as for this whale spout, you might almost stand in it, and yet be undecided as to what it is precisely. (M-D 1192)

This conversation, which is typical of many, engages the reader in pleasant banter, and suggests that Ishmael is an admirable, straight-forward chap, when he is actually highly manipulative. His acknowledgment that 'plain' speech is 'the most knottiest of all', should warn us of the dangers of acceding to his garrulousness: 'Here, now, are two great whales, laying their heads together; let us join them, and lay together our own' (M-D 1145).

By resisting the incorporation offered by such remarks, we are liberated to scrutinise the way that Ishmael assembles his narrative. As I said above, the chronology which he proposes is false; he had not yet encountered Moby Dick when he embarked on the *Pequod*. A more accurate



chronology, which also involves the audience's reading process, is this: the Events experienced by Ishmael (the story); their Relation in *Moby-Dick* (the discourse); the Reading of the book after its publication.<sup>27</sup> What Ishmael attempts in writing up the 'Events' at the stage of 'Relation' is to deny them their full reality. As we have seen, a primary way that he does this is by duplicitously portraying Ahab and Moby Dick. Another way that he does it, however, is by appending to his narrative, in 'Relation', all the incidental detail about whaling. Critics again seem to have viewed this point as insignificant, with only Nina Baym stressing it sufficiently:

The anatomizing of the whale is conducted in the work's present time; it is presented as Ishmael's reflections as he is now, in the process of working on his book, and not as he was many years before on the *Pequod*.

Although the focus of her interest is different from mine, she even goes on to say:

Another fifteen or so chapters, including "The Sphynx" and the "Whiteness of the Whale," for example, rise from the fictional context but expand on it, and these chapters are also placed in the present rather than in the past.

In other words, at least two of the key chapters, in which Ishmael seeks to 'elevate' the quest and its object to 'metaphysical' status, together with all those in which he exalts 'The Honor and Glory of Whaling', date from the time when he could have been producing a simple narrative about the chance loss of a ship to a whale. Having had the experience of being sunk, Ishmael then sets himself the task of denying the judgment that this implies, through the writing of a narrative.

My understanding of Ishmael's meticulous whaling descriptions - and his 'Cetology' - is that they are part of a system by which he tries to control and suppress the full realisation of Moby Dick's impact on the *Pequod*. They are paralleled in this, not only by his 'shaping' of Ahab and the whale, but also by the Etymology and Extracts with which he prefaces



the story, and the many intertextual allusions to his sources and other 'authorities' with which he loads it. All of these are attempts to 'lose' the basic fact that a whaling ship was sunk at sea. Ishmael's discourses, puns, and outrageous comparisons are intended to set the reader puzzles and to entertain. He desires that the reader should become engrossed in his narrative; and the many critics who have diligently attempted to explain the significance of the order of derivations in the Etymology have done precisely this. Certainly Ishmael's tale is absorbing; but should we allow ourselves to be assimilated on his terms?<sup>22</sup>

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ix) Melville's Sub-text

If we do allow ourselves to be so appropriated, we overlook the considerable challenge that Melville sets his readers to discern the 'sub-text' hidden beneath Ishmael's relation. It is in listening to what Ishmael denies and suppresses that we surely produce a more satisfying reading of the novel than one that is based on 'diversion'. I have already demonstrated much of what I think Ishmael denies, but there are some further points to make.

The first concerns Ishmael's relationship with Queequeg. I have already suggested that the narrator subjects the Polynesian to the same categorising rhetoric as any of his elitist forbears; but with what success? Consider their meeting:

'Speak-e! tell-ee me who-ee be, or dam-me, I kill-e!' again growled the cannibal, while his horrid flourishings of the tomahawk scattered the hot

tobacco ashes about me till I thought my linen would get on fire. But thank heaven, at that moment the landlord came into the room light in hand, and leaping from the bed I ran up to him, (*M-D* 818)

Here the Westerner is compelled to submit by the islander, and appears weak in contrast:

'You gettee in,' he added, motioning to me with his tomahawk, and throwing the clothes to one side. He really did this in not only a civil but a really kind and charitable way. I stood looking at him a moment. For all his tattooings, he was on the whole a clean, comely looking cannibal. What's all this fuss I have been making about, thought I to myself - the man's a human being just as I am; he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him. Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian. (*M-D* 818-9)

The result is a wedding embrace from which Ishmael is powerless to release himself: 'for though I tried to move his sleeping arm - unlock his bridegroom clasp - yet, sleeping as he was, he still hugged me tightly, as though naught but death should part us twain' (*M-D* 821). Hence, quite literally, Ishmael has been bedded by a 'cannibal', and has complied with this command.

In other words, Queequeg reverses the rape of the Pacific by the West. But Ishmael, unable to accept this fact, maintains his conventional language. Although it no longer describes an actual dominance, Ishmael still attempts to use his narrative to situate the Polynesian. The resultant disharmony between real power and stated power recalls the end of *Typee*, although in reverse. When Ishmael persists in acting as if he has control, the reader attuned to the characteristic attitudes of the representative narrator has the inconsistencies of the narrative made fully apparent. This is most explicitly true when Ishmael and Queequeg 'solemnise' their relationship:

I was a good Christian; born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church. How then could I unite with this wild idolator in worshipping his piece of wood? But what is worship? thought I. Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth - pagans



and all included - can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood? Impossible! But what is worship? - to do the will of God *that* is worship. And what is the will of God? - to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me - *that* is the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why, unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him in his. (M-D 849)

While ostensibly showing attractive tolerance (and many recent critics have applauded Ishmael here), in the nineteenth-century context this was unthinkable behaviour.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, it does not at all show 'toleration' on Ishmael's part; he retains his elitist desire to proselytise, but is forced to attempt it by covert means.

A similar inconsistency occurs later in the narrative, when Ishmael and Queequeg are attached together by the 'monkey-rope'. Here Ishmael can again seem to approve of the bond which ties him to the harpooneer, calling him 'my dear comrade and twin-brother' (M-D 1136), but closer analysis reveals that he resents it: 'So, then, an elongated Siamese ligature united us. Queequeg was my own inseparable twin brother; nor could I any way get rid of the dangerous liabilities which the hempen bond entailed' (M-D 1135). It seems that these 'dangerous liabilities' stretch further than the rope of shared humanity. The only way that Ishmael can recontain Queequeg is to 'evaporate' him from the narrative; whenever he appears in person, he exposes the narrator to ridicule. Even so, Ishmael is ultimately saved by Queequeg's intended coffin; the man whom he has called 'a new-hatched savage running wild about his native woodlands in a grass clout' (M-D 852), gives to the resentful Westerner the object that preserves his life. Thus the example of Ishmael's narrative treatment of Queequeg, and of his failure to place him successfully, is another demonstration of the 'pressure' under which he writes. This is also true of Ahab.



Despite all his strategic portrayal, Ahab threatens Ishmael. Like Redburn with Jackson, Ishmael cannot distance himself from the captain. Whatever his narrative may generally suggest, while on the *Pequod*, he was mastered by Ahab. This is explicitly acknowledged only once, but the admission is of great importance:

I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine. With greedy ears I learned the history of that murderous monster against whom I and all others had taken our oaths of violence and revenge. (*M-D* 983)

Here Ishmael confesses that he was complicit in Ahab's feud.

The narrator, who represents the interests of the whale-ship-owning class, admits that like the other sailors he agreed to pursue one white whale, to the exclusion of profit. This is another thing that he wishes to suppress, for it undercuts his class-affiliation. It suggests that Ishmael did not oppose Ahab strongly enough to safeguard the interests of the owners he represents. Moreover, why should Ishmael have acceded to the 'mad' Ahab's demands if it was he who portrays him as mad - unless Ishmael is frightened to acknowledge that his portrayal was false, and that Ahab was maddened by his service in the whaling industry? In either case, his narrative is inconsistent. When he says:

The White Whale swam before him [Ahab] as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. (*M-D* 989)

is it not more correct that the white whale swam before Ishmael, as he produced his narrative, knowing what Moby Dick had done to the *Pequod*? This accords more with the facts as we have discussed them, although Ishmael, of course, must never admit it:

How it was that they so abundantly responded to the old man's ire - by what evil magic their souls were possessed, that at times his hate seemed almost theirs; the White Whale as much their insufferable foe as his; how all this

came to be - what the White Whale was to them, or how to their unconscious understandings, also, in some dim, unsuspected way, he might have seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life, - all this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go. (*M-D* 992)

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x) Reading and Repression

So in *Moby-Dick* Melville produces a novel composed from Ishmael's narrative and the visible sub-text which this generates beneath. Ishmael represses his own awareness of the underside of the whaling industry and the symbolic sinking of the *Pequod* by attempting to use 'mad' Ahab and the supernatural whale as decoys. Nevertheless, his presentation fails for those who are attentive to its flaws. Was anyone sensitive to them?

I said above that 'The Town-Ho's Story' rehearsed the issues and demonstrated the textual strategy of *Moby-Dick* by being published before the novel. This microcosmic effect is reinforced by the fact that the story refers to another incident so distant in time from that in the novel itself. Both of these points indicate Melville's continuing wish to test his audience, and perhaps also his continued commitment to them. For while it is true that the *Pequod*'s sinking is a metaphor that expresses judgment on contemporary America, it is also true that should the audience have recognised this fact, then it could have served as a warning to encourage them to avert the cataclysm. This wish to use the reading process educationally characterises all Melville's fiction. The various narrators are developed as images of decentred elitism that the audience should consider, and then repudiate. The flawed, sometimes very odd,



narratives are intended to discomfort and yet to provoke. All of this is even more true in *Moby-Dick*, with its exploitation of the 'Event, Relation, Reading' chronology and the 'Town-Ho' episode.

But while from this perspective *Moby-Dick* could be seen as a clear warning from Melville to his contemporaries, it does also encode his historical pessimism as he responded to the world around him. This is because the novel is about wilful repression, which one could see as the endemic characteristic of the American upper classes in the mid-nineteenth-century. Although he has recognised the dark side of capitalism more than any previous narrator, Ishmael accepts the duty imposed by his class-affiliation, and writes up his experience on the *Pequod* to praise the whaling enterprise, and thus the capitalism that it signifies. While he may have been set adrift in the middle of the Pacific by the whale, and most improbably found and rescued so far from land by another ship, he still suppresses any intention to write a narrative that would have criticised the economic circumstances which placed him in that situation. This point articulates Melville's disgruntled recognition that class loyalty was of the greatest significance in mid-nineteenth-century America. Instead of using his pen to denounce the system which caused the crew to drown, and nearly lost him his life, the good elitist Ishmael produces an artful 'Epilogue' which exploits his favourite presentational techniques - supernaturalism and Shakespeare:

*The drama's done, Why then here does any one step forth? - Because one did survive the wreck,*

*It so chanced, that after the Parsee's disappearance, I was he whom the Fates ordained to take the place of Ahab's bowsman, when that bowsman assumed the vacant post ... So, floating on the margin of the ensuing scene, and in full sight of it, when the half-spent suction of the sunk ship reached me, I was then, but slowly, drawn towards the closing vortex, (M-D 1408)*

Yet Ishmael knows the enormity of this crime, and cannot expunge from his



narrative the traces of what he refuses to accept; he suffers from the 'hypos' (M-D 795), and includes in his story recognitions of the deaths caused by the whaling industry:

SACRED  
To the Memory  
OF  
JOHN TALBOT,  
Who, at the age of eighteen, was lost overboard,  
Near the Isle of Desolation, off Patagonia,  
November 1st, 1836  
THIS TABLET  
Is erected to his Memory  
BY HIS SISTER,

(M-D 830)

Ishmael's repression, then, vitalizes Moby Dick's blow, discovering for the sensitive reader all the other things which Ishmael hides in his story, such as his racism, class-consciousness, and the consistent way that he attempts to present a distorted reality. These things, which Melville locates in his novel's sub-text, correspond to the actual neuroses of contemporary elitist America. We have seen the way that the dominant classes structured reality to accord to the 'idea of America', and how they sought to protect this structuration at all costs. Part of the horror suggested in *Moby-Dick* for the elitist reader who, like Ishmael, refused to accept plain facts, is that should this system ever collapse, these various 'genies' would be apparent to all. When, after the Civil War, this seemed to have happened, and not only Southern blacks were freed, but poor whites also emancipated, the old national elite moved quickly to end the aberration, and secure its hegemony. During the presidencies of Johnson and Grant, 'black codes' were enacted that systematically stripped both emancipated and free-born people of most of their hard-won rights. Representative Henry MacNeal Turner commented in the Georgia House debate in 1868 under which two senators and twenty-four of his fellow representatives were expelled from their offices on racial grounds:

Why, sir, though we are not white, we have accomplished much. We have pioneered civilization here; we have built up your country; we have worked in your fields, and garnered your harvests, for two hundred and fifty years! And what do we ask of you in return? Do we ask for compensation for the sweat our fathers bore for you - for the tears you have caused, and the hearts you have broken, and the lives you have curtailed, and the blood you have spilled? Do we ask retaliation? We ask it not. We are willing to let the dead past bury its dead; but we ask you now for our RIGHTS ... 29

They did not get them. The elitist coalition survived.

This, for me, is the most upsetting part about reading *Moby-Dick*, and yet also the evidence of the book's deep insight. For the fact that Ishmael survives the wreck seems to be a pessimistic premonition of what would occur should there ever have been an historical event to match it. Writing in 1851, Melville did not yet have the experience of the Civil War to draw on, but in the Compromise and its attendant industrialisation, he had sufficient awareness of the kind of processes by which the national elite was working to maintain its dominance. In a sense, the Compromise was itself an act of repression - it deferred tackling intrinsic injustices and enabled the rulers to turn their backs on reality. Yet when war followed a decade later, because they had accumulated industrial wealth and ever greater duplicitous political acumen during the intervening years, those same rulers were also enabled to survive the wreck. The words "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee" (*M-D* 1408), spoken by the elitist representative narrator, are the most dispiriting and prophetic in the book. From this perspective, however inimical and immoral it may be, repression bears dividends.

How did contemporaries receive *Moby-Dick*? Did they accept it as a warning, and resolve to do something to avert catastrophe, or was it a judgment that they ignored? 'Rhapsody and purposeless extravagance' said the *Illustrated London News* (1 Nov 1851), 'wilder and more untameable' said

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the New York *Evangelist* (20 Nov 1851), and 'wildly imaginative and truly thrilling' said the New York *Tribune* (22 Nov 1851). Although the reviews ranged from being dismissive to adulatory, the deeper issues raised by *Moby-Dick* were simply disregarded. No nineteenth-century commentator wished to appreciate that *Moby-Dick* even had an interest in contemporary events. Its 'unconscious' has been left for us to uncover.<sup>30</sup>

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## CONCLUSION

'Keep true to the dreams  
of thy youth'

Herman Melville

(Found pasted to the wall of his desk after his death)

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Any analysis of Melville's works must therefore finally centre on his understanding of the reading process itself, as it is demonstrated by the structure of his texts. It has been fundamental to my argument that Melville wished to communicate with and educate his audience, and the device of the representative narrator is in the first instance a piece of pragmatism to enable this to occur. By ensuring that the central figure in the texts was someone with whom the majority of the readers would identify, the author assured for himself a constituency; he opened his negotiations by seeking to meet people 'where they were'. This is also the reason for making such consistent use of popular literary genres: the sea story, the travel narrative, and all the other conventions which Melville utilised enabled him to capture the audience's attention.

Hence *Typee* and *Omoo* were both popular books. I have emphasised the way that they question economic and political imperialism, but part of their irritant success is that they do not bluntly disown Western activities. On the contrary, they provided the audience with recognisable fare, and as a result it attended to the author. Only a few were immediately outraged by the 'attacks' on the missionaries; the full potency of the condemnation only becomes apparent slowly. As most readers identified with the narrator, his double-edged quality was at first obscured.

In *Mardi*, however, Melville decided to exploit his construction more obviously. Carrying his previous audience with him, and at first fulfilling its expectations, he then progressively frustrated them. Taji, that symbolic representative voice, is subverted and marginalised. The collusion in exploitation in which the audience had been indulging with Tommo and his successor is slowly revealed. Alarming, the 'sanctioned'

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narratorial voice is undercut and heavily satirised. Here, reading becomes unsettling; *Mardi* disconcerts and disappoints. - Not surprisingly, the audience reaction was different from that to *Typee* and *Omoo*. Many were angered, most were bemused, and some even recognised that they were the object of authorial manipulation. Because they wished to resist the alarming revelations that *Mardi* attempted to press upon them, however, there was an almost universal call for Melville to resume the 'conventional' approach of his first novels.

This, indeed, is what he did in *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*, and as we have seen, the sense of relief was almost audible. Here were sea novels, novels of initiation, novels of description, entertainment, and 'shared' expression. The representative narrators seemed once more to be generally in control, Melville had apparently regained his sanity. - But of course all that he was doing was playing his audience and accepting the need to retain that audience if he was to make any contribution to contemporary debate at all. Neither novel was the innocuous 'cakes and ale' that he publicly claimed they were; *Redburn*, indeed, was almost as unsettling in parts as *Mardi*.

Then with *Moby-Dick* Melville returned to the themes of repression and collusion, but in a more complex way than *Mardi*. Questions of chronology and the reader's attention to narratorial strategies were more important here than the blunter discomposure of the earlier novel. The author's verdict, however, was not any easier to avoid; the novel pronounced his repudiation of the methods and policies of the mid-century elite. Ishmael is found to be an inadequate practitioner, and his narrative is flawed.

So in each of these six books, Melville seeks to raise the audience's



political consciousness by targetting its literary sensibilities. Pleasure in the library or salon is shaded into discomposure in the market-place and factory. This political aspect to the reading process is the inevitable consequence of literature's participation in the elite's system of ideological control. A history or an essay or a novel was constructed to accord with certain social ideals, and designed to promote these covertly as it was read or performed. Melville is exploiting the elite's (privately) acknowledged understanding that there is no such thing as anodyne 'art'; all 'expression' is loaded and pointed. In these novels, it is his awareness of the process of reading itself which enables the author to conduct his analysis. How do we respond to subverted images of ourselves? What is our tolerance level when we are confronted with that which we still wish to suppress? How do we suppress those unwanted insights that we sometimes get while reading? - In the tale *The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids* (1855), Melville showed that he was indeed alive to the 'mechanics' of nineteenth-century America's rhetoric. Here the narrator is compelled to recognise that paper exploited in elitist discourse is produced at the expense of human lives:

All sorts of writings would be writ on those now vacant things - sermons, lawyers' briefs, physicians' prescriptions, love-letters, marriage certificates, bills of divorce, registers of births, death-warrants, and so on, without end.

Although the narrator is himself a seedsman, not an author, the implications of the image are clear enough:

Before my eyes - there, passing in slow procession along the wheeling cylinders, I seemed to see, glued to the pallid incipience of the pulp, the yet more pallid faces of all the pallid girls I had eyed that heavy day. Slowly, mournfully, beseechingly, yet unresistingly, they gleamed along, their agony dimly outlined on the imperfect paper, like the print of the tormented face on the handkerchief of Saint Veronica.'

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My proposition, therefore, is that throughout his career, Melville was attempting to use the writing and reading of books as a way to challenge the current hegemony of the American elite classes. From the first stumbling attempts in the *Fragments from a Writing Desk* through the novels that we have been considering above, he was developing a literary technique that would engage that elitist audience in dialogue. Knowing that reform and change was only possible if he were to retain his readership, I feel Melville sought to provoke debate within the conventional grounds of contemporary literary genres. His books were the tools with which he chipped at the structures of power through which his society was ordered. His representative narrators, while being the central expressions of his dissent from 'shared' values were also his ways of creating his constituency. His 'composite' texts were designed to be literary confections, because this was the way he saw that he could gain attention for himself.

But this said, is it not true that in his later years Melville repudiated his critical commitment, and lapsed into philosophical conservatism? This line is taken by many critics, and cannot be fully discussed here.<sup>2</sup> However, in stressing my feeling that he maintained his early compositional technique unchanged to his death, I hope at least to provoke further debate about these claims. Consider, for instance, his approach in *Israel Potter* (1855). This exploits the potential for sensitizing an audience through contrasting sources and deploying literary conventions; it is also a passionate denunciation of the way an America rooted to a fixed 'idea of America' favours the rich at the expense of the poor. Similarly, *The Confidence Man* (1857) again exploits the notion of



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the world/ship, but the *Fidèle* is now filled with conventional social and literary figures in an unholy combination of the unwanted and unacknowledged. Here the cripples and the capitalists, the oppressed blacks and the devious evangelists are all forced upon the readers as a cross-section of American life. Even in the poetry, such as *Battle Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866), Melville assembled his text from newspaper articles and the general source, *The Rebellion Record*. Again, these poems are not 'pure' lyricism, but composite pieces, mediated by the voice of what amounts to a narrator.

Claims for Melville's conservatism, especially when based on the poems, seem to me consistently limited by the willingness to attribute sentiments and attitudes 'directly' to the author. This is one of the things that I have been exploring in the thesis - so much of what is proposed in a Melville text is the suggestion of the narrator or of the other characters that it becomes very difficult to discern Melville's own position, and certainly cannot be done in an unproblematic fashion. In *Benito Cereno* (1855) for instance, we are provided with an appendix of testimonies and statements to sift. This is designed to present the reader with a puzzle; how to respond to these various claims? This is also *Billy Budd's* approach, with its discursive style and narrator who is so intent on presenting the mystery of Billy's death that he follows all the participants to their destruction, and even the *Bellipotent* itself to its decommissioning, with the result that it is finally impossible ever to attribute 'blame' conclusively to any of the characters involved. As the narrator so 'helpfully' points out:

The symmetry of form attainable in pure fiction cannot so readily be achieved in a narration essentially having less to do with fable than with fact. Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges; hence the conclusion



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of such a narration is apt to be less finished than an architectural finial.<sup>3</sup>

But this is so apt it could be a final comment on Melville's works; what he consciously produced were pieces that had 'ragged edges', and only by attending to those edges will the slightest perception of 'truth' will be attained. So when I read a book such as *Pierre* (1852) I try to be less concerned with subjecting it to standards of realism and probability than with imagining the deeply uncomfortable effect of reading this novel as a wealthy American in the nineteenth-century. Would my son also disown me? Is my wealth founded on exploitation and hidden passion? Do I prefer to repress this knowledge than to face it courageously and seek to do something about it? - *Pierre* shadows forth all of these alarming questions, and was explicitly targeted at the wealthy, leisured, and repressive upper classes.

Hence I do not subscribe wholeheartedly to the established view of Melville's conservatism, and I think that many critics have caused themselves needless pain:

I was trained in the New Criticism. I identify myself now as then as left of center. I came to Melville at the crest of his rediscovery, and I love his work - I wish that Melville had developed an anti- or non-conservative orientation in the profundity of his ideas.<sup>4</sup>

This, I feel, is to miss the absorbing reading experience that Melville offers those who are willing to entrust themselves to his texts. Certainly nothing can be easily recovered, and one must always be willing to be surprised and upset; but this is precisely what Melville wants us to be. The chance that he offers us is to transfer our allegiance from the paraded prejudices of the representative narrators to the elusive and subversive perceptions of the author. Nothing is forced and nothing is incontrovertibly declared, but lots of things are hinted at, and most

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importantly, we are given the freedom to draw our own conclusions.

And if we do follow Melville down what I think is his way, we are surely encouraged to scrutinise our own world very carefully. As C.L.R. James stresses, Melville's work was formed in the early period of industrial capitalism, and is vital testimony to the processes of this social and economic phenomenon:

That period ushered in the world in which we live. For our world, a world of wars, the fact is neglected that the Civil War was the first great war of modern times. The great Americans of the period preceding it knew that something was wrong, something deeper than slavery, but inasmuch as they lived under democracy and the republic, and had no monarchy nor land-owning aristocracy to contend with, their task was difficult. They probed into strange places, and what they found they did not often fully understand. There were no precedents. It is only today when democracies and republics once more have to examine their foundations that the work of Poe, Hawthorne, Whitman, Garrison and Philips and Melville can be fully understood.<sup>2</sup>

This insight is important because it suggests that Melville did not have a fully-formed 'system', but that he was sceptical of the claims of the society in which he lived, and wrote to register his dissent from them. The point that it makes is that we still live in that same capitalist world; and that we should therefore be sceptical of the claims that are made to us.

Although Melville's work was largely 'silenced' in his own day, because he wrote subversively, the insights of his novels are still recoverable now. If we open ourselves to the challenges of reading his books, and if we attempt to measure our responses against what we feel were the responses of the original audience for whom Melville wrote, we may be able to discern some of the things which were preoccupying the author. This is what I have tried to do. Melville sought a dialogue with his audience in his first six books that was meant to stimulate them. His aim was to create a sensitized, sceptical reader. Having done this, he

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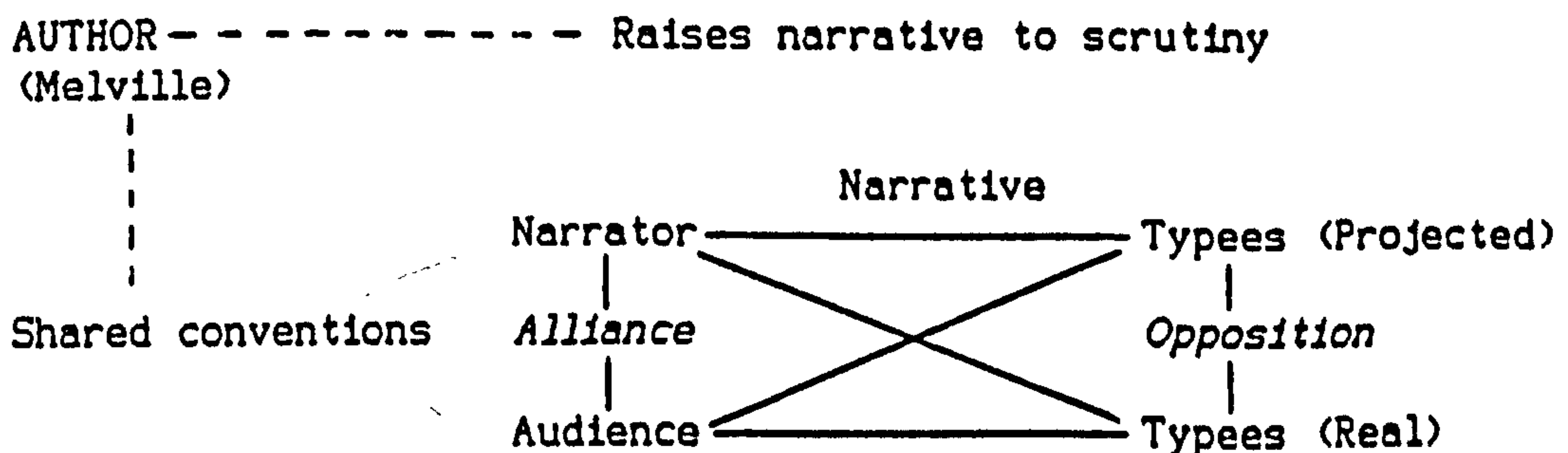
sought to alert that reader to the racism, imperialism, political manipulation, rigid class systems, poverty and social marginalisation that he saw all around him. Should his modern reader attempt to do the same?



## APPENDICES AND NOTES

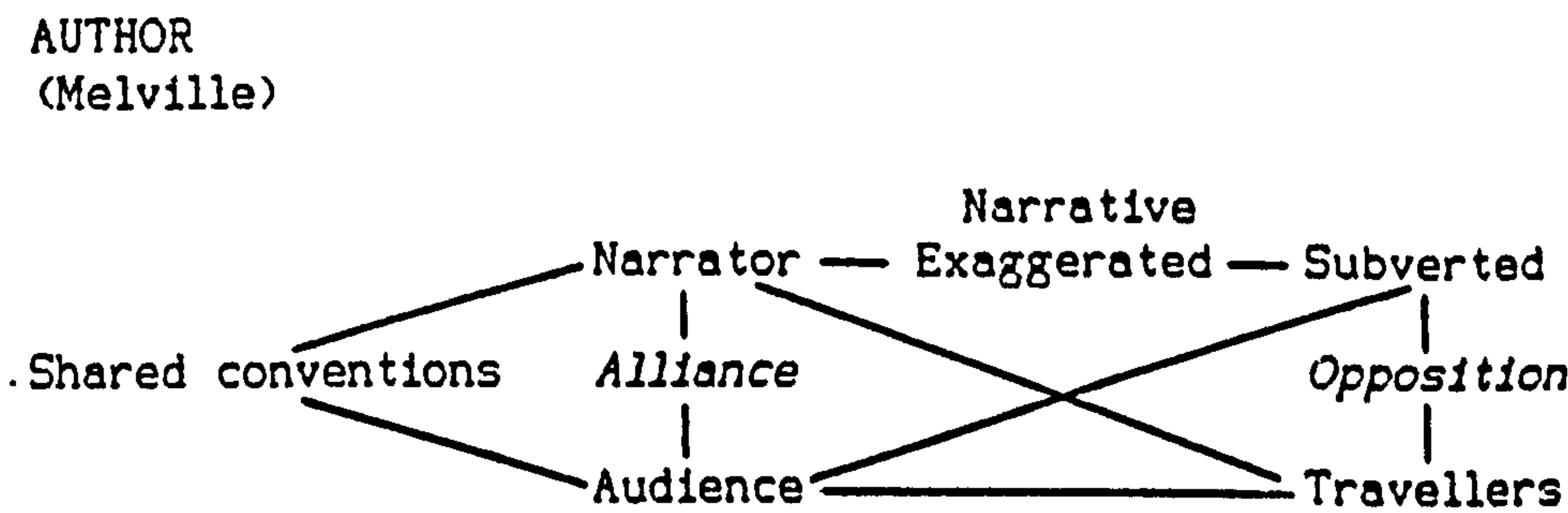
I suggest below a way in which Melville's typical textual structure could be diagrammatically explained. Although the diagram has a family resemblance to A.J.Greimas' 'semiotic rectangle', and Frederic Jameson's subsequent adaptation, it should not be taken as a slavish attempt to apply their formulae. Many diagrams could be drawn; this is intended only to offer hints and clarifications - attention should be focussed primarily on my comments in the main text.

### Structure as in Types



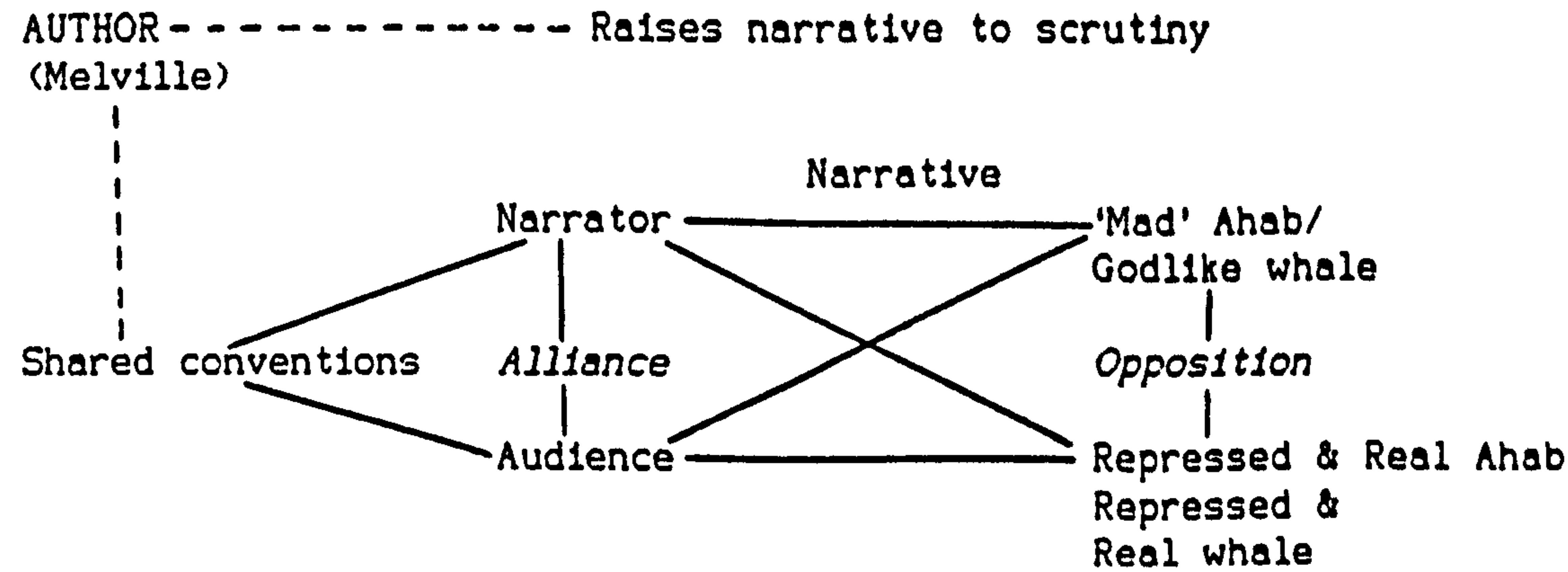
This kind of structure is also employed in *Omo*, *Redburn*, and *White-Jacket*.

Structure as in *Mardi*



This is an approximation of the process as applied in *Mardi*. Here Melville does not so much raise his narrator's narrative to scrutiny as encourage it to be directly subverted. Because Taji produces something that is so exaggerated, this must be repudiated. This is more of an 'internal' structure, which relies on the other travellers and the narrator's own exaggeration to expose him.

Structure as in *Moby-Dick*



Melville's activity here resembles that in the majority of the novels. He again wishes us to scrutinise Ishmael's narrative, and to oppose the narrator rather than ally with him. Yet the opposition inherent in the text is this time between two active yet repressed figures, Ahab and the whale, which are thus more destructive to Ishmael's narrative project than the 'contained' Pacific islanders of *Typee*.

In each of these diagrams, I hope it can be seen that Melville's larger text itself encompasses the 'reading process', and is composed of matched or opposing elements that inevitably generate tension, as the narrators try to control them. His texts are intended to be 'dynamic' and open-ended, not static and already-achieved.



Typical Narrative Structure

CHRONOLOGY	Narrator's acknowledged reaction	Narrator's unacknowledged motivation/feeling
1 DEPARTURE		
Voyage out	- Narrator states intention (Mission/Naval duty) - Is on Western ship	- Is thus in 'stable' society
2 NOTICES BEAUTY		
	- Presents it as familiar landscape	- ( eg. Comments on waterfalls)
3 MEETS ISLANDERS		
Recoils	- from 'idolatry'	- (DISORDER)
Categorisation		- as a way to control
Comparison	- with Western values	
Attraction		- to women/lifestyle
4 (The Traveller returns home and writes Narrative. He <u>uses</u> it to control his disorder.)		
5 SHAPED NARRATIVE		
		- Narrator considers: What will the audience and sponsors think? I must anticipate what they expect. Religious, economic and ideological imperatives are ..
Romanticisation		
Landscape again	- Romanticised	
Shared values	- Emphasised	
Patriotism	- Emphasised	
Piety	- Emphasised	
'Entertainment'	- Invoked as principle	... EXPOSED
6 RETURN HOME		
(fictional)	- Values 'vindicated'	

Melville responds to the unacknowledged motivation, subverting his narrators' use of their acknowledged reactions.

This table is an attempt to illustrate some of the recurrent features of South Seas travels. Any commentary on this genre is almost inevitably over-simplified. Many of the travels considered are missionary narratives, but some were written by naval officers. All, however, were consulted in the composition of *Typee*, *Omoo* (and implicitly *Mardi*).

Moreover, they all share a common feature, to which I wish to draw attention: the narrative is shaped with a specific use in mind. I have suggested that one aspect of this is to hide the disorder into which the travellers were thrown as a result of their experiences (T.W.Herbert makes a similar observation). Implicit to this secretive intention is the fact that the narratives can never be the 'records of experience' that one can assume they are on a first reading. Whether or not the original authors fully realised the extent to which they were using their texts to 'manage' their own feelings, in doing so they turned their memoirs into emotional props. Hence, by recognising the kind of things that they emphasised to bolster their Westernness, and to convince their sponsors that they have not been contaminated by the pagan Pacific, we can discern the kind of values, acknowledged or not, which were characteristic of Western elitist culture.

My reading thus suggests that the audience was a determining factor in the way that these authors wrote. They wished to prove their moral probity, and they set out to do so by writing narratives that demonstrated it. Indeed, of course, all the narratives, even the seemingly most dour ones, were designed to entertain the audience, and to make the reading experience pleasurable.

Melville inserted his texts into this environment in two ways: the narrators sought to emulate their narrative predecessors in emphasising their Westernness and in entertaining; the author focussed on what the travels unwittingly revealed of hidden attitudes and imperatives.

Thus it is clear that the writing and reading of such travels established a cyclical collusive movement. If the travellers wrote wanting to fulfill the audience's expectations, then their texts actually became ways of governing those expectations. When the audience turned to its next narrative, if this failed to fulfil anticipations, it could be written off as a 'fiction'. Given such a situation, subversion was the only possible method of indicating any dissent.

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Travels consulted: Capt.C.H.Barnard *A Narrative of the Sufferings and Adventures of ...* (1829); F.W.Beechey *Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific and Beering's Strait* (1828); J.Byron *The Narrative of the Honourable John Byron* (1822); W.Ellis *Polynesian Researches* (1829); O.von Kotzebue *A New Voyage Round the World in the years 1823, 24, 25, and 26*; D.Porter *Journal of a Cruise made to the Pacific Ocean in the years 1812, 1813, and 1814* (1815); C.S.Stewart *A Visit to the South Seas in the U.S.Ship Vincennes during the years 1829 and 1830* (1831); and D.Wheeler *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labours of the late Daniel Wheeler* (1842). Although not specifically a travel, M.Russell *Polynesia: A History of the South Sea Islands* (edition used, 1849) was also consulted by Melville, and is an interesting additional text.



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Typical Narrative Structure

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1	'Hidden motivation':	Nationalism Moral proclamation Christian proselytising 'Anti-impressment'
2	A protestation of 'truth' is made:	(Barnard, Nevens, Leech)
3	Motives for first voyage relayed:	Boyish romanticism for the sea (Myers, Nicol, Seaman) Father's death (in novels)
4	<i>Voyage Out</i>	Finds ship (Redburn Buys clothes Peter Simple) Details duties
	Acclimatisation	
	Variable section	First 'reverses' - humour Attitude to captain (alters with different captain) Descriptions of places visited Description of crew Changes ship (merchant > navy?) Mutiny Battle A romance occurs Yarns told
5	The Return Home	To family? Frequent monetary requests (in factual narratives)

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There is again the problem of defining the genre. I have specifically termed it 'sea stories' in order to combine narrative reminiscences with novels; as the boundary between these tended to be blurred, I have considered both forms together, taking my licence from one of the central practitioners of the genre:

The writer has published so much truth which the world has insisted was fiction, and so much fiction which has been received as truth, that, in the present instance, he is resolved to say nothing on the subject. (J.F.Cooper *Afloat and Ashore* (1844, edition used New York, 1864), p.iii.)

As I commented in Chapter 6 *White-Jacket*, the narrative structure is primarily determined by the voyage out and return home motif; within the boundary of the 'first voyage' and the 'final return' there is an almost infinite possibility for additional journeys. Consequently, one should not expect to find all of the variable elements in every novel or narrative - but it is striking that most of them appear in many books. Similarly, it



is striking that most of the books have a 'hidden motivation'. Novels, or the narratives of officers and captains, are usually inspired by patriotism (for example, Hart or Barnard), whereas seamen's reminiscences are more typically be governed by Christian affirmation or the request for money.

In all of the books, however, the reader is courted by the narrator, and the narrative voice tends to be strong. Even when we are presented with no more than a string of incidents, we are left in little doubt about the narrator's feelings on a particular subject, such as Captain Barnard's attitude to the British: 'the black criminality and Arab conduct of the natives of the fast-anchored isle, the bulwark of religion and liberty ...' (C.H.Barnard *Narrative* (New York, 1829), p.262). - And as this comment shows, the narrator's voice characteristically displays its own prejudices as it speaks, in this case, revealing the American's pervasive racism, not just his patriotism. Such comments reinforce my previous contention that the genre is deeply conservative; another of Barnard's remarks illustrates the manipulation of 'generalities' that so often hides bias: 'Life is indeed filled with vicissitudes. The changes of the natural day are a striking picture of the bright and gloomy circumstances in which we may be placed in' (p.33). Barnard is actually a hard, contemptuous man, although his determination to survive may be attractive to some.

Conservatism is demonstrated, moreover, in the names of 'exemplary' sailors. Virtually all the books have at least one figure who is an implied moral centre: Masterman Ready, Long Tom Coffin, Jack Gunn, Tom Tiller. These names somehow exude responsibility when set against a figure such as Captain Dogfish. Although they are drawn from the novels, these sailors also occur in the narratives, in the form of the older man who befriends the youth on his first voyage out. Significantly, such figures are never officers or captains, who usually occur in binary oppositions (good captain/drunk officer; weak captain/efficient officer), and they are never turned into the 'handsome' sailor either (occurring rather in Dibdin's poems). Indeed, Jack Chase figures seem to be remarkably absent from the genre. It is also interesting that many of the capable sailors either die or are written out from the texts before they end, so allowing their protégés, the heroes/narrators to assume full prominence. Other typical sea story characters include the negro cook or servant, the innocent boy, the foolish midshipman, the landlubber, and the 'mystery figure'. This latter is in Melville frequently a Scandinavian, and is the nearest thing to the 'competent' sailor in his fiction (consider Dansker in *Billy Budd*).

Class concerns are, therefore, central to the genre, with the ship providing a clearly stratified society for consideration. When, in the novels, women are added in the form of officers' wives or lovers, a sufficiently wide range of characters is available for many different issues to be tackled. The author/narrator usually aligns himself with what might be termed the 'moral centre'; while he claims breeding and education, he is also careful to prove that he is not a slavish aristocrat. Even the lower-class authors, by their act of producing their narratives, attempt to arrogate to themselves a certain status. In general, these men do not radically criticise the contemporary social settlement; if they are hoping to attract charity, they are frequently deferential. Of the memoirists only Nathaniel Ames dissents bluntly from the mercantile ethic, and he attempts to balance his blows by projecting his own entertaining character in his asides. Melville, of course, is the consistently subversive member of the group.



Finally, it is characteristic of the genre that even when the tale is one of deprivation and great danger, a priority is still placed on description and entertainment. The fact that sailors travel closely aligns their rhetoric with that of the Pacific missionaries. John Byron, who is shipwrecked off Cape Horn, dutifully delineates Santiago 'By the description of one house, you have an idea of all the rest. You first come into a large court ...' and also says that his book is a 'fund of information and amusement [which] details the adventures of intelligent voyagers and travellers' (J.Byron *Narrative* (Aberdeen, 1822), pp.139, ix).

In both *South Seas Travels* and *Sea Stories*, the audience thus exercised a controlling influence over the shape of the narratives and the attitudes they displayed. As I have attempted to show, a pattern developed which because it provided a stable bill of fare was difficult to frustrate openly. This in turn came to control perceptions about maritime and Pacific life. If their expectations were not upset, how could the readers learn that Polynesian islanders were different from those about whom they constantly read? If the image of Robinson Crusoe was repeatedly invoked (as in Barnard), the audience's collusive attitude would never be challenged. These texts became central features of the elite's system of representational hegemony. - Melville's subversion fully reveals this strategy.

This being the case, I find it sad that little work has been done to consider the political intentions and rhetorical techniques of these authors. Both genres were highly influential in the nineteenth-century, furthering imperialism and elitist rule. Yet detailed attempts to understand their ideology of form have still to be made. These two Appendices are intended to illustrate certain features of the genres as they especially illuminate the study of Melville's novels, not to be an exhaustive analysis of them. Perhaps this work should now be done.

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Texts consulted: Capt.C.H.Barnard *A Narrative of the Sufferings and Adventures of ...* (1829); F.W.Beechey *Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific and Beering's Strait* (1829); British Seaman *Life on Board a Man-of-War* (1829); J.Byron *The Narrative of the Honourable John Byron* (1822); J.Colnett *A Voyage to the South Atlantic* (1798); J.F.C.Cooper *Afloat and Ashore* (1844), *The Red Rover* (1834), *Ned Myers, or, A Life Before the Mast* (1843); R.H.Dana *Two Years Before the Mast* (1843); J.C.Hart *Miriam Coffin* (1834); S.Leech *Thirty Years from Home* (1843); W.Leggett *Naval Stories* (1835); F.D.Marryat *Peter Simple* (1834), *Mr.Midshipman Easy* (1836), *Masterman Ready* (1841); W.Nevens *Forty Years at Sea* (1848); M.Scott *Tom Cringle's Log* (1829-33); and J.S.Sleeper *Tales of the Ocean and Essays for the Forecastle* (1842). These whaling narratives were also used by Melville, and to a certain extent participate in the genre: F.D.Bennett *Narrative of a Whaling Voyage Round the Globe* (1840); H.T.Cheever *The Whaleman's Adventures in the Southern Ocean* (1850); and F.A.Olmsted *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage* (1841).



## Notes: Preface

1 T.Walter Herbert, *Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilisation* (Cambridge, 1980).

2 Sacvan Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad* (Madison, 1978); Donald E. Pease, *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* (Madison, 1987).

3 Robert Clark, *History, Ideology and Myth in American Fiction 1823-52* (Basingstoke, 1984); James Duban, *Melville's Major Fiction: Politics, Theology, and Imagination* (Dekalb, 1983).

4 Marvin Fisher, *Going Under: Melville's Short Fiction and the American 1850's* (Baton Rouge, 1977). Fisher's discussion of the short stories provides a useful introduction to this whole area of Melville's concern, but it is necessarily very limited in extent.

5 Harold Beaver - the introductions to the Penguin editions of *Moby-Dick*, *Redburn*, and *Billy Budd, Sailor & Other Stories* (Harmondsworth, 1972, 1976, 1967), and also essays in the *New Pelican Guide to English Literature*. No9. *American Literature*, edited by Boris Ford, (Harmondsworth, 1988) and *Herman Melville: Reassessments*, edited by A. Robert Lee (London, 1984) - Beaver is significant because, published by Penguin, his is the voice that is most formative to the majority of British readers of Melville; William B. Dillingham, *An Artist in the Rigging, Melville's Short Fiction 1853-1856, Melville's Later Novels* (Athens, 1972, 1977, 1986).

6 It could be argued that Michael Rogin's *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (Berkeley, 1979) was the book, in addition to Melville's own, which encouraged me to start thinking about this thesis. It is in many ways an excellent understanding of Melville's life and works, but it is so elegant that I was eventually led to question its assumptions and method. Rogin is perhaps ultimately less concerned with the realities of life in nineteenth-century America than with providing an almost psychologically-determined reworking of the life of a major author; Melville, I feel, was pre-eminently concerned with those realities. Other authors have, therefore, informed my analysis, and I here briefly record my debt to them.

The classical description of the narrator/author relationship is found in Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (2nd edition, Harmondsworth, 1987). Gérard Genette's concept of narrative discourse is also profoundly important, refining the Formalist distinction between 'plot' and 'story' into a distinction between story, discourse, and narration. 'Narration' is the act of addressing the audience, 'discourse' is that which is presented, 'story' is the representation of events in which the person who is making the address can appear as a character (Genette's example is from Virgil's *Aeneid*), see Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Oxford, 1980), and also Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London, 1983). Another influential modern text in this field is Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London, 1980).

Frank Kermode's work on narrative emphasised how sensitive one should be to authorial and narratorial strategies: Frank Kermode, *The Sense of An Ending: Studies in the theory of fiction* (Oxford, 1966); *Essays on Fiction* (London, 1983); *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* (2nd edition, Cambridge Mass., 1983). M.M. Bakhtin then interested me in rhetoric, and the ability that a text has to carry many voices, all of which are accurate representations of contemporary political classes:



M.M.Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (translated and edited by M.Holquist, Austin, 1981). Terry Eagleton also argued cogently for the significance of the ancient study of rhetoric, and the importance to recover some of its power in modern reading: *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1983). Most stimulating of all, however, was Frederic Jameson, who showed that it was possible for a materialist critic to engage with structuralist and post-structuralist thought without thereby denying history: *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, 1971); *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, 1972); and especially *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London, 1981). Some of the implications of Jameson's work are ably expounded in William C.Dowling, *Jameson, Althusser, and Marx: An Introduction to the Political Unconscious* (London, 1984). Raman Selden also assured me that it was possible to combine elements of varying methods, and still retain integrity: *Practising Theory and Reading Literature: An Introduction* (Hemel Hempstead, 1989). Pierre Macherey provoked my thought about the process of text-formation in *A Theory of Literary Production* translated by G.Wall (London, 1978).

Two critics who clarified particularly the state of American criticism are: Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (London, 1980); and Russell Reising, *The Unusable Past: Theory and the Study of American Literature* (London, 1986).

Marshall Blonsky alerted me to the function that image systems have in determining our world, and thus to the possibility of a 'social semiotics': *On Signs* (Oxford, 1985). Peter Berger provoked analysis of the non-verbal art of the period: *Ways of Seeing* (London, 1972). Murray Edelman has recently interested me in the theory of political hegemony - from a political theorist's rather than a literary critic's point of view: *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago, 1988). Similarly, E.H.Carr and Arthur C.Danto have contributed an element of historical theory: *What is History* (London, 1961); *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge, 1965). Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth, 1985) was of huge significance in informing me about the processes and politics of Western self-justification in colonialism.

Finally, my own experience in the church <sup>with</sup> those Christians who are seeking to voice their disagreement with what are claimed to be 'founding moral principles', and yet not suffer immediate rejection and enforced silence, has educated me to the difficulties of self-expression. How to say what one believes and yet as a 'representative figure' avoid invalidation? In the contemporary church, this would seem to be difficult - as it clearly was for Melville in his own time and circumstances. And yet perhaps the voices struggle through. I recommend Jacques Pohier's *God - In Fragments* (London, 1985).

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#### Notes: Introduction

1 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (first published 1835, 1840, edition used New York, 1945), p.3.

2 See Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics* (Revised edition Homewood Illinois, 1978); the quotation comes from the *Washington Globe* 29 April 1836 (quoted Pessen p.79). Pessen is



one of the leading historians of the period. His thorough documentation of contemporary sources provides easy access to the underlying situation. (References will be given subsequently within the text.) Nevertheless, Pessen's is not a lone voice. The greatest historian of the American working class, Philip Foner, is equally sceptical. Among historians, if not literary critics, dissent from the Toquevillean veneer is widespread. See Philip Foner, *A History of the Labor Movement in America* (New York, 1947-64); *We, the Other People: Alternative Declarations of Independence by Labor Groups, Farmers, Women's Rights Advocates, Socialists, and Blacks 1829-1975* (Urbana Illinois, 1976); Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (London, 1980).

3 By the term 'upper classes', I mean that social group which I shall generally refer to as the 'elite'; those people who had a significant stake in society, whether in terms of property, family or education. The whole nature of class in the nineteenth-century U.S.A. is very problematic, but I wish to emphasise the fundamental difference between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

4 See H.Zinn (cited above, note 2) for further examples of the oppression and marginalisation of women, Indians, workers and slaves. Zinn takes a more overtly 'oppositional' stance than Pessen.

5 See Michael J.Heale, *The Presidential Quest* (London, 1982).

6 'Local legislatures were composed of merchants, lawyers, men of affairs and eminence, and a sprinkling of successful artisans and entrepreneurs. Rarely present in these bodies were the journeymen mechanics and the laborers who constituted the majority in their communities.' (Pessen p.98.)

7 Quoted Walter Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement 1829-1837* (Stanford, 1960) p.219.

8 Here it is important to grasp the extent to which the supporters of the Equal Rights Party were dissatisfied with the current political situation. Although Hugins insists on calling the New York Workingmen 'Democrats' (in itself testimony to the pervasiveness of the supposedly bipartite division), their Declaration of Rights demonstrates their new view.

9 One of the sub-themes of Heale's *The Presidential Quest* (see above, note 5), is the perceived need to fit candidates to acceptable patterns in order to achieve election. See especially chapter 7.

10 Horace Greeley, quoted Joel Silbey, *The Transformation of American Politics 1840-1860* (Englewood Cliffs New Jersey, 1967), p.22.

11 Michael J.Heale, *The Making of American Politics 1750-1850* (London, 1977), p.149, my emphasis.

12 See Garry Wills, *Inventing America* (London, 1980), on this subject.

13 Again, see Wills, pp. 216-217.

14 Lemuel Shaw (1781-1861) was Chief Justice of Massachusetts from 1830-60. In this capacity, he made many keynote decisions, especially in labour legislation. His most controversial ruling, however, was to return the runaway slave Thomas Sims in 1851, under the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Law. His apparent motives typify those of the contemporary elite, for all notions of equity were suppressed by the desire to maintain the American Union: 'He was obsessed with the fiction that it [the Union] would never have come into being had it not provided for the return of runaways ... The important point is not that his history was wrong but that it was considered essential to a decision of the case for reasons of high



policy: the necessity for maintaining peace in the Union'. Leonard W. Levy, *The Law of the Commonwealth and Chief Justice Shaw* (New York, 1967), p.107.

15 See Rush Welter, *The Mind of America 1820-1860* (New York, 1975), Part One pp.3-74.

16 James Sutherland, Democrat Representative for New York (quoted Welter, 1975, p.375). Even so-called radical Democrats shared the belief that the U.S. polity should be immutable. Benjamin Hallett, for instance, commented in 1841 'the struggle of the oppressed millions is to reform and change government. Under our institutions, the struggle only need be to make the administration of the government conform to the Constitution.' quoted Welter, p.8.

17 Clive Bush, *The Dream of Reason: American Consciousness and Cultural Achievement from Independence to the Civil War* (London, 1977), p.60.

18 The picture is by James Barry, and is entitled 'Phoenix'. Although Barry was a European, the suggestion of America as a haven of classical order amidst a wilderness of tyranny exactly captures the elite's projection of the state. See S. Symmons, 'James Barry's Phoenix: An Irishman's American Dream', in *Studies in Romanticism*, 15, 4, (1976).

19 For instance, in his lists of Best and Better Sellers in the U.S. (in Francis L. Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of the Best Sellers in the United States* New York, 1947), F.L. Mott notes *The Federalist Papers* and *The Spectator*, both sets of collected essays, and also Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous works in this genre. Representing histories, there are Washington Irving's *History of New York*, William Robertson's *History of Scotland*, T.B. Macaulay's *History of England*, and of course George Bancroft's and William Prescott's various volumes, while Francis Parkman's and John L. Motley's histories also secured wide readership. Interestingly, Melville owned two volumes of Richard Hildreth's six volume *History of the United States of America* (New York, 1851-2). Melville had those parts of this less popular, less conformist history which dealt not with the Revolution itself, but with the Constitution, and especially with how this was put into effect. This suggests a detached but lively interest on the part of the novelist in the way the elite secured its rule, that is in keeping with his estrangement from his class and family. (See Part Two: The specific novelist Herman Melville 1819-91, below.)

20 Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay, *The Federalist, or the New Constitution* (first published New York, 1787-8, edition used London, 1911), p.53

21 Samuel Eliot Morison in *An American Primer* edited by Daniel J. Boorstin (Chicago, 1968), pp.24-5.

22 Quoted from Bush, p.68. Bush also comments on Jefferson's architectural work at Monticello and the University of Virginia. The aim here was to create a classical, instantly appealing style. Ironically, taste demanded that servants' quarters and stairways be obscured, leaving them as physical traces of evident class-inspiration. See also Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land* (New York, 1975).

23 One contemporary analyst who appreciated the situation was Karl Marx, who in his essay *On the Jewish Question* commented on the elite's carefully structured notional freedom for the mass of the U.S. population. See K. Marx, *Selected Writings* edited by David McClellan (Oxford, 1977), pp.39-63.

24 Donald Weber, *Rhetoric and History in Revolutionary New England*



(New York, 1988), pp. 150 and 156.

25 John Quincy Adams, quoted in Dennis E. Baron, *Grammar and Good Taste: Reforming the American Language* (New Haven, 1982), p.17.

26 See Charles S. Swann, 'Noah Webster: The language of Politics/The Politics of Language' in *Essays in Poetics* 13:2, (1988), p.74. Swann provocatively interrogates the distinction between Webster's expressed politics and the politics inherent in his linguistics. He thus emphasises Webster's links with the radical English theorist Horne Tooke, but is unable to progress further than to say: 'I cannot pretend to be entirely happy with the formulation' (p.74). - Yet it is totally clear from the essay that Webster was unable to divorce his published views on language from his own politics, so making this relationship central to study of the period.

27 See William N. Bragance, *A History and Criticism of American Public Address* (first published 1943, edition used, New York, 1960), from an article 'How to Electioneer' in the *Jeffersonian Republican* 26 Oct 1833.

28 See John Quincy Adams, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory* (Cambridge, 1810), p.265.

29 T. Greene 1828 address to the members of the New Bedford Lyceum in Carl Bode, *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind* (New York, 1956), p.21.

30 See Bode (1956), p.102, where the 1831 national committee is listed: Stephen Van Rensselaer (state senator, general, landowner); The Revd. Proudfit Griscom; Edward Everett (minister, Congressman); Thomas Grimke (Charleston lawyer, temperance campaigner); and Roberts Vaux (judge, originator of the Pennsylvania public-school system) - in Boston, one of the leading instigators of the lyceum was the politician Daniel Webster. Bode also describes the resolutions passed concerning teachers: 'the most important advocated daily Bible reading in school, proposed the establishment of training schools for teachers, favored teachers' meetings under local lyceum auspices, and praised schoolteachers of the nation ' (now estimated at 50,000) as a body on whom the future character and stability of our institutions chiefly depend.' (Bode p.102).

31 Lemuel Shaw, *An Oration delivered at Boston July 4 1815* (Boston, 1815).

32 Daniel Webster Bunker Hill Oration 1843 in *D. Webster Reader* selected and edited by B.M. Rothe (New York, 1956), pp.85-8.

33 Edward G. Parker, *The Golden Age of American Oratory* (Cambridge Mass., 1857), p.2 - Parker was a Boston lawyer, a Yale graduate who later turned to journalism, editing the political department of the *Boston Traveller*. He was a volunteer aide to the Unionist General B.F. Butler in 1861, and later adjutant to General J.H. Martindale, who commanded Washington. He was thus the model of an elitist politicians/lawyers/literati. See Appleton's *Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, 1888), Vol IV p.650.

34 Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (London, 1965), p.316.

35 David Simpson, *The Politics of American English 1776-1850* (New York, 1986), pp.145-7. Here Simpson is rejecting the view of American language development popularised by Boorstin (see above, note 31), and before him by H.L. Mencken (see *The American Language: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States. Supplement One*, New York, 1945). These, preoccupied with the effect the huge number of new words coined in nineteenth-century America seem to have had on 'standard'



discourse, propose a theory of a 'democratic language'. Simpson undercuts this by suggesting that one does not need to approve the sentiments of, for instance, Western cattle ranchers, in order to incorporate their expressions into one's speech. Indeed, to do so may only be a way of exploiting them. While believing that this tendency probably operated in the U.S. before 1840, I whole-heartedly agree with Simpson's argument. It is almost as if Mencken and Boorstin have become blind to the harsh politics of class. Boorstin records how great speeches, attributed to orators of the past such as James Otis or John Adams were actually modern fabrications. Daniel Webster, for example, penned the classic lines: 'We shall make this a glorious, an immortal day. When we are in our graves, our children will honour it ... independence now, and INDEPENDENCE FOREVER.', not Adams, to whom they are attributed. Included in *McGuffey's Eclectic Reader*, this speech was then ingrained into those children in state schools, who, following McGuffey's instructions, were required to read as if reliving the original experience. But what experience were they reliving? - Not that of the people's Revolution, but of their own continued subjugation. As Simpson says, it is important to look through the surface of the rhetoric to the attitudes beneath.

36 'Declaration of Independence of the Producing from the Non-Producing Class', Sept. 1844, in *We the Other People*, edited by Philip S.Foner (Urbana, 1976), p.58. Here is testimony that the working classes were not simply the rustic-mouthed labourers of Boorstin's presentation, but people intelligent enough to attempt to subvert one of the founding documents of the elite's state. Almost inevitably, because they challenged the Declaration of Independence, their protest was marginalised, but although their parody Declaration is in one sense testimony to the elite's defining rhetorical control, the attempt to cut a new beginning from within the system shows the extent of their political awareness; totally open dissent would have been even more likely to be repressed.

37 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (first published 1851, edition used 1981), p.vii).

38 Michael D.Bell, *The Development of American Romance* (Chicago, 1980), p.xiv. For another useful overview of this critical perspective, see Sergio Perosa, *American Theories of the Novel: 1793-1903* (New York, 1983). Perosa suggests that the romance/novel distinction was an acknowledged part of contemporary critical thought. He thus concludes many things, for instance the following, which no longer seem self-evident to me:

Romance seemed originally to be inherent in the American experience, a consequence of the predominance of the wilderness over society ... But romance was also seen and proposed in negative terms as a short-cut or a way out of the American lack of social characteristics and historical connotations: it was imposed by the mere fluidity and amorphousness of its daily life, by its absence of recognizable degrees, signs, hierarchies. (Perosa p.51)

39 See the essay on Pierce by Roy Franklin Nichols in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* p.1059.

40 See Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Centenary Edition* Vol.6 (Ohio, 1972). Note the way in which the rhetoric draws the listener in, to enjoy the recounting of the supposedly shared story:

Has the youthful reader grown weary of Grandfather's stories about his Chair? Will he not come, this once more, to our fireside, and be received as his own grand child, and as brother, sister, or cousin to Laurence, Clara, Charley,



and little Alice? Come, do not be bashful, nor afraid. You will find Grandfather a kindly old man, with a cheerful spirit, and a heart that has grown mellow, instead of becoming dry and wilted, with age.

He will tell you how King George, trusting in the might of his armies, sought to establish a tyranny over our fathers. Then you shall hear about Liberty Tree, and what crowds used to assemble within the circumference of its shadow ... and look! a warlike figure, on a white horse, rides majestically from height to height, and directs the progress of the siege. Can it be WASHINGTON? (pp.143-4)

41 A concise statement of this intent is made by Raman Selden in his book *Practising Theory and Reading Literature* (Hemel Hempstead, 1989), when describing the 'New Historicists' he says they claim: 'human life is shaped by social institutions and specifically by ideological discourses ... actively constituted through social struggle ... [in which] dominant ideologies sustain and keep social divisions in place' (p.95). Frank Lentricchia locates this firmly within the tradition of American scholarship when he says that we must refute the still active legacy of New Criticism, and argue instead that :

As an act of power marked and engaged by other discursive acts of power, the intertextuality of literary discourse is a sign not only of the necessary historicity of literature but, more importantly, of its fundamental entanglement with all discourses. Frank Lentricchia *After the New Criticism* (London, 1980), p.350.

I am not, then, wishing entirely to debunk the concept of 'romance' in Hawthorne. Hawthorne clearly did use the term. To me, however, it seems like a tactical move in order to create some kind of individual space for himself within the field of American letters. My objection is to the turning of 'romance' into a determining principle which makes us overlook other, perhaps more important, elements in an author's work. Jane Tompkins in the chapter 'Masterpiece Theater: The Politics of Hawthorne's Literary Reputation', in her *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (New York, 1985), describes very succinctly how an author's work is both itself political, and subject to the political forces of the period in which it is published:

The argument that follows is not critical of the way literary reputations come into being, or of Hawthorne's reputation in particular. Its object, rather, is to suggest that a literary reputation could never be anything other than a political matter. My assumption is not that 'interest and passion' should be eliminated from literary evaluation - this is neither possible nor desirable - but that works that have attained the status of classic, and are believed to embody universal values, are in fact embodying only the interests of whatever parties/factions are responsible for maintaining them in their position ... It is to point out that the literary works that now make up the canon do so because the groups that have an investment in them are culturally the most 'influential'. (pp.4-5.)

42 William Charvat, *Literary Publishing in America 1790-1850* (Philadelphia, 1959); Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution through Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1986). Buell's book is significant because it includes a long Appendix that lists the results of the sociological surveys he has conducted on authors' family backgrounds. It would be good to see a parallel work devoted to the entire U.S.



43 The quotation comes from the popular periodical *New World*, and can be found in James J. Barnes, *Authors, Publishers, and Politicians: The Quest for an Anglo-American Copyright Agreement 1815-1854* (London, 1974), p.15.

44 Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, 1984), p.276.

45 William Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations* edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by H. Zohn (London, 1982), forms an interesting comment in this context. It ironically underlines that in the nineteenth-century U.S.A., any revolutionary 'democratisation' of art due to mechanical advances was prohibited, because an ideologically cohesive elite owned all the publishing houses and printing presses. In fact, because of this, the mechanization of culture strengthened the control of the elite.

46 Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York, 1979), p.71. For the most concise introduction to Young America, see Perry Miller, *The Raven and the Whale* (New York, 1956), especially 'Book Two'. Miller is alive to the political implications of the movement, as this quotation demonstrates:

Today we can hardly conceive how in the 1840s the political parties were involved with the concern for literature and education. Protectionism was not something separate from style; a man's stand on the Bank was one with his stand on the romance, (p.110.)

47 Capt. Frederick W. Beechey, *Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific and Beering's [sic.] Strait* (London, 1831), p.216.

48 J. Bayard Taylor, *Views A-foot, or Europe Seen with Knapsack and Staff* (New York, 1846).

49 See Appleton's *Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, 1888).

50 J.S.C. Abbott, 'George Washington' in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* Vol 12 (Feb. 1856). The sheer size of this industry must be stressed. Books such as Mason Weems' *Life of Washington* (1800) saturated the market.

51 'A Traveller's Farewell' (400,000 copies sold by 1850) quoted in Carl Bode, *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture 1840-1861* (Berkeley, 1959), p.139.

52 The *Brief History of the American Tract Society* - a quotation from the 1835 entry, in Bode (1959), p.133.

53 Maria Cummins, *The Lamplighter* (first published 1854, edition used undated London), p.186.

54 Tompkins, p.185.

55 I am not alone in this argument. For instance, while arguing from a different range of sources, David Simpson (see above, and note 35), suggests that most contemporary authors, apart perhaps from Cooper and Melville, seem to have espoused rhetoric and literature as systems of control. He styles this approach the 'Transcendental paradigm', because he sees it most clearly in Emerson:

The Transcendentalist paradigm seems to have satisfied the requirements of an academy that needs ... a pure, abstract, theoretical literature, one related indeed to the *idea* of the American self and the language it might speak, but one very far removed from any overt representation of the crises of the period in which it came into being, (Simpson p.257)

This supports my view that the lyceum and lecture movement, in which Emerson performed most of his major work, is one of the clearest examples of an elitist strategem to perpetuate social dominance. Yet, more clearly



than Simpson, I have tried to link this literary 'idea of the American self' to a demonstrable political concept, the 'idea of America', and to show that both are pillars of the same elitist construction. Other commentators such as Nina Baym and Jane Tompkins share this political sensitivity. The general point which is being proposed is that we need to recover both an awareness of the politics of language and a recognition that the supposed categories of 'high' literature and 'other works' do not distinctly exist. Whatever a work's 'status' it partakes in some way of the characteristic discourse of the age.

56 Eleanor Metcalf Melvill, *Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle* (Cambridge Mass., 1953), p.1.

57 Allan had Chesterfield's *Principles of Politeness* in his library - see Merton M.Sealts, *Melville's Reading: A Checklist of Books Owned and Borrowed* (Madison, 1966).

58 See William H.Gilman, *Melville's Early Life and Redburn* (New York, 1951), for a synopsis of events.

59 Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class; An Economic Study of Institutions* with an introduction by C.Wright Mills (first published New York 1899, edition used, London, 1970), p.257.

60 Standard works are Leon Howard, *Herman Melville: A Biography* (Berkeley, 1951); Charles R.Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas* (New York, 1939); William H.Gilman, *Melville's Early Life and Redburn* (New York, 1951); Merrill R.Davis, *Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage* (New Haven, 1952); Newton Arvin, *Herman Melville* (New York, 1950). Hershel Parker's *Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons: Literary Authority in American Fiction* (Evanston, 1984), acidly demonstrates the close relationships and shared assumptions that have dominated American literary criticism in the twentieth-century.

61 Howard records that: 'Their cousin Guert Gansevoort was later to "blame" Herman seriously for going to sea, and they knew in advance that a voyage on a whaler would be shocking to their relatives and friends - especially since the mystery of their cousin Thomas was a familiar reminder of how readily a man could be lost to his family even though he might survive the dangers commonly associated with whaling' (Howard p.39). Despite making this point, Howard does not interrogate its ramifications for understanding Melville's biography.

62 I speak below of the way that attitudes latent in novels such as *The Lamplighter* should have caused Melville's audience to question at least some aspects of his narrators' behaviour. It should be stressed that I am not suggesting that Melville was writing with a copy of *The Lamplighter* open beside him on his desk. Although this may well have been the case with some of the sources for *Typee* and *Omoo*, *The Lamplighter* was unpublished in 1839. The point is that the general shared context of the *Fragments* and sentimental novels would have provided a set of criteria for the audience, so enabling them to assess their ideological image which they saw reflected there.

63 It is, of course, significant in this light that a Captain Amasa Delano did exist, and that Melville probably owned a copy of his *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels* (1817). By refusing to credit the testimony of the 'aristocratic' captain, Delano nearly precipitates his own death, not just the Spaniard's; yet having seen the danger, it is this 'democratic' American who ruthlessly orders the suppression of the slave revolt. This elimination of a threat to American capitalism was to find an exact counterpart in the activity of elitist Unionists in the Civil War. When Melville was using his sources to create his representative



narrators, he drew upon actual words and statements; the narrators may be 'fictional', but their attitudes are historically verifiable. The world presented in his novels and stories is precisely the world in which his audience was living.

64 F.O.Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* (New York, 1941), is still the founding text in this movement, but David Morse's *American Romanticism* (Basingstoke, 1987), is a good modern example.

65 See, for example, James Baird, *Ishmael* (Baltimore, 1956). Also consider the effect that the linguistic formulations of Mencken and Boorstin (discussed in note 35, above), have had on conceptions of Melville. As I shall argue below, what has happened is that the 'tall talk', word play and coinages of a narrator such as Ishmael have been directly attributed to Melville, making the author seem to be the literary nationalist, not his typical narrator.

66 The phrase 'a man who lived among the cannibals' comes from a letter that Melville wrote while engaged on the composition of *Moby-Dick* (to Nathaniel Hawthorne, No. 84 in *The Letters of Herman Melville* edited by William H.Gilman and Merrill R.Davis, New Haven, 1960, p.130). It indicates the extent to which he felt constrained by the limitations placed on him by his contemporaries - but suggests that his anger is caused because he feels he has been mis-read. The full quotation is: 'To go down to posterity is bad enough, any way, but to go down as "a man who lived among the cannibals"!'. Melville obviously saw himself in a somewhat different light.

67 I shall not be dealing at length with *Pierre*, mainly for reasons of space. In some respects it seems to me Melville's most imaginative and heartfelt novel, largely because alone of all his narrators, Pierre moves from being the object of satire to being the source of social dissent. Moreover, Pierre is obviously an 'author' in his own right, and is therefore more easily identifiable as the object of Melville's scrutiny. What is declared in *Pierre* is latent in the other books; which may be why it suffered more immediate condemnation.

68 For a full discussion of the way that I situate my own approach within the interpretative tradition, see the Preface.

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#### Notes: *Typee*

1 Evidence for this historical analysis is taken from: Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches, Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774-1880*. (Honolulu, 1980). Other sources for details of Western attitudes to the Pacific will be listed below.

2 Herman Melville, *Typee*. edited by George Woodcock, (Harmondsworth, 1972).

3 William E.Sedgwick, *Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind* (Cambridge Mass. 1945) pp. 28-29.

4 J.Wenke, 'Melville's *Typee*: A Tale of Two Worlds' in *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Typee*. edited by M.R.Stern (Boston, 1982), 251-257 (p.251).

5 J.P.Joswick, 'Typee: The Quest for Origin', *Criticism* 17 (Fall 1975) 335-54 ( p.340).

6 T.Walter Herbert, *Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilisation*. (Cambridge Mass., 1980) see especially Chapter 6.



7 Robert Clark, *History, Ideology, and Myth*. (Basingstoke, 1984), p.135, p.137.

8 Charles Wilson Peale (1741-1827) was a fashionable portrait painter who fought in the Revolution. In 1781 he opened a gallery of Revolutionary heroes and in 1784 his museum; a collection of various objects assembled to illustrate in nature the principles of liberal philosophy. As it was these principles which underpinned the new American state, the museum itself became a register of political attitudes, and its existence demonstrates the way that articles of all kinds were made to bear hidden ideological import. Peale's museum directly inspired the later, and even more famous American Museum of P.T.Barnum. See C.C.Sellers (Peale's biographer) in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, p.501.

9 Charles S.Stewart, *A Visit to the South Seas in the U.S.Ship Vincennes*. (New York, 1831); William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*. (London, 1829); David Porter, *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean*. (Philadelphia, 1815).

10 See Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (Harmondsworth, 1978).

11 This library, the largest lending library in London, operated a rigorous censorship policy. According to Guinevere L.Griest (*Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel*. Newton Abbot, 1970), Mudie's firm was so large, taking on average 1500 copies 'sight unseen' from a major publisher such as Bentley (who published all Melville's novels after *Typee*), that to antagonise him was to commit virtual authorial suicide. The fact that Melville's works (except *Pierre*) were all stocked by Mudie indicates the success with which he penetrated the defences of the trans-Atlantic literary establishment.

12 An interesting footnote on the specific role of language in 'naming' in an 'orientalist' context is offered by the various titles given to the Marquesas over the centuries. First called 'Marquesas' by the Spanish, the islands were subsequently repeatedly renamed, as they came under different Western influences: Nukuhiva was called 'Federal Island' by the Americans in 1791, then 'Sir Henry' Martin's' by the British, 'Baux' by the French, and 'Washington' again by the Americans. In each case, the bestowal of the name denoted possession. All of these names are imperialist markers, for in the Polynesian language the island is called 'Nukuhiva', while the 'Marquesas' as a group were called simply 'Te Henua' - 'the land' (see Denning p.22).

13 See William B.Dillingham, *An Artist in the Rigging: The Early Works of Herman Melville*. (Athens Georgia, 1972), pp. 23-24, and *Critical Essays* edited by Milton R.Stern (cited above, note 3), p.6.

14 Charles R.Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas*. (New York, 1939).

15 Janet Giltrow, 'Speaking Out: Travel and Structure in Herman Melville's Early Narratives', *American Literature* 52 (March 1980), 18-32.

16 See Henry F.Pommer, *Milton and Melville* (Pittsburgh, 1950) and Nathalia Wright, *Melville's Use of the Bible* (Durham North Carolina, 1949), p.24.

17 The echo of *Robinson Crusoe* and the more extensive parallel with gothic novels sheds much light on Tommo's narrative. Brown's *Edgar Huntly*, as shown by Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown Conn., 1973), pp.384-90, is a novel of captivity, confusion and agonised questioning. In a series of journeys through a dreamlike landscape of caves and waterfalls that are first picturesque, then terrifying, the hero seeks to preserve his identity as it is threatened by the 'savage' Indians, the textual expressions of his



own acts of violence. This reworking of the archetypal captivity narrative, which had had a formative influence on American literature, exposes the persistent strategic denials that were at the basis of elite-imposed American culture. *Typee* also does this, by itself reworking as Tommo's shaped narrative that captivity myth, and then revealing its shaping.

18 See, for example, Leon Howard, *Herman Melville* (Berkeley, 1951), p.101.

19 For instance, in describing the final battle during which his ship was captured, Porter relates the interchange of slogans between the British and Americans. When he flies the banner 'Free trade and sailors rights', the British retort 'God and country; British sailors' best rights; traitors offend both', and Porter replies 'God, our Country, and Liberty; tyrants offend them' (Porter p.151). This indicates a sturdy defence of American standards designed to impress the population - but it also shows Porter's hidden insecurity.

20 See Michael Wheeler, *The Art of Allusion in Victorian Fiction* (Basingstoke, 1979) for an analysis of the way that nineteenth-century audiences were adept in making cross-references and spotting allusions. We should acknowledge that in a pre-televisual age, the aural memory was much sharper.

21 Consider this statement by a typical Congressional politician, as recorded by Michael Rogin:

The Indian was the brother with an original title to the land. But, explained Hugh Henry Brackenridge, 'there is no right of primogeniture in the laws of nature and of nations'. Whites followed the biblical injunction to 'subdue and replenish' the earth, 'the lordly savage' did not. In sole possession of 'the exuberant bosom of the common mother', he lived in a 'state of nature', and gained 'subsistence from spontaneous productions'. Agricultural people represented a superior stage of development; they had the God-given right to dispossess hunters from their sovereignty over nature ... The evolution of societies from savagery to civilization was identical to the evolution of individual men. The Indian was the elder brother, but he remained in the 'childhood' of the human race'. (Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York, 1975), p.6.)

Almost every remark here is echoed by Tommo. Melville surely had the parallel of the American-Indians closely in mind when constructing his exemplary narrator Tommo.

22 In an interesting essay in his *American Literature in Context I 1620-1830.*, Stephen Fender demonstrates how concern about silence, voice, and language as it related to American-Indians (and hence to 'savages' generally) was widespread in the contemporary U.S.A. He focusses particularly on Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), showing how in this book this sensitive author registered his dissent from those of his fellows who wished simply to argue the Indians into non-existence. By means of his portrayal of Indian language as more than just 'monosyllables denoting material objects to hand', as Senator Lewis Cass thought (p.183), Fender argues that Cooper exposes the real issues:

By now, though, the real struggle is not between white and Indian, but between Americans who are willing to live at peace in their environment, to tolerate what they cannot understand completely, accommodate diversity of landscape and



peoples (even Spanish-speaking Roman Catholics, perhaps even what is left of the Indians), and other Americans who continued to look for virgin land to exploit in a hurry for quick profits, who kill what they cannot understand and therefore fear. (Stephen Fender, *American Literature in Context 1 1620-1830* (London, 1983), p.194)

However 'projected' Cooper's portrayal of American-Indian speech may be, he uses it in his text as a contrast with Western discourse, and so to analyse the motivations of this discourse. Again, language is politics.

23 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selected Essays*, edited by Larzer Ziff (Harmondsworth, 1982), p.49). In contrast, the liberated Transcendental American can fruitfully exploit linguistic 'savoir faire': 'That which was unconscious truth becomes, when interpreted and defined in an object, a part of the domain of knowledge, - a new weapon in the magazine of power' (p.55). It is precisely this contrast between Western use of language as tool and the (however impressionistic) understanding that it was to Indians direct expression, that Melville explores in the contrast between Tommo and the Typees. The real struggle is again between representative elitists such as Emerson and Tommo, and dissentient voices, such as the Typees and Melville.

24 Claude Levi-Strauss says in his *Structural Anthropology*, translated by C.Jacobson and B.Grundfest Shaepf (Harmondsworth, 1977);

Tattoos are not only ornaments. As we already noted with respect to the North-West Coast ... they are not only emblems of nobility and symbols of rank in the social hierarchy; they are also messages fraught with spiritual and social significance. The purpose of Maori tattoos is not only to imprint a drawing onto the flesh, but also to stamp onto the mind all the traditions and philosophy of the group. (p.257.)

Although this is not a specific analysis of Marquesan signification structures, the parallel is close enough to be permitted. He makes the further point that it is only once they have been tattooed that people achieve their predestined social potential:

Decoration is actually created for the face; but in another sense the face is predestined to be decorated, since it is only by means of decoration that the face receives its social dignity and mystical significance. Decoration is conceived for the face, but the face itself only exists through decoration. (p.261.)

It is this fear that 'deep down' he too may be a 'savage' which motivates Tommo's violent reaction.

25 It is possible to use Levi-Strauss' discussion of tattooing as a further explanation of this point. In propounding the 'necessity' of the tattoo, he remarks: 'In the final analysis, the dualism is that of the actor and his role, and the concept of mask gives us the key to its interpretation' (p.261). The ironic crux here is that as the tattoo is a physical 'scar', while it may be a mask, it cannot be removed; the actor is tied to the role. Western actors, like Tommo, because they are aware that they are 'playing a part', manipulate this distinction for their own ends.

26 This has been an implication throughout the chapter, and while evidence about Melville's own attitudes is scanty, there is enough of it to render a Typee/American-Indian parallel at least possible. In his review of Francis Parkman's *Oregon Trail*, 'Mr.Parkman's Tour', he indicates his disquiet with contemporary attitudes:



We are all of us - Anglo-Saxons, Dyaks, and Indians - sprung from one head and made in one image. And if we reject this brotherhood now, we shall be forced to join hands hereafter. - A misfortune is not a fault; and good luck is not meritorious. The savage is born a savage; and the civilized being but inherits his civilization, nothing more. Let us not disdain then, but pity. And wherever we recognize the image of God let us reverence it; though it swing from the gallows. (Herman Melville, 'Mr. Parkman's Tour' in *Uncollected Prose*, Cambridge 1984, p.1146.)

Although employing characteristic rhetoric to gain his magazine-audience's ear, this piece is much more stern than the similar sentiments of Congressman T.O. Bouldin, as reported by Rogin:

Many of our first families and most distinguished patriots are descended from the Indian race. My heart compels me to feel for them, for some of my nearest relations (not that I have myself any of their blood) are descended from the Indian race. (Rogin (1975) p.5)

Similarly, the fact that Melville had Parkman's *History of the Conspiracy of Pontiac* (1851) in his library suggests the extent of his disquiet. Although this is a later work than *Typee*, and is dismissed by Rogin, as H. Doughty (*Francis Parkman*, New York, 1962, throughout) insinuates, this elitist author in a sense became so beguiled by the image of the dispossessed Indian that it comes over more cogently in his writing than that of the 'successful' white colonisers. This is especially so in the *Conspiracy*, which records the organised rebellion of Iroquois tribes against New England British.

27 'Empire on the Pacific' is the shortened title of Graebner's classic book: *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion*. (New York, 1955). The quotation is from Samuel Eliot Morison *Maritime History of Massachusetts 1783-1860.*, (Boston, 1923), and can be found in Graebner, p.7.

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#### Notes: *Omoo*

1 Herman Melville, *Omoo*. edited by Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, 1968), 'Historical Note' G. Roper p.326, p.341.

2 Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York, 1983), p.85.

3 Figures in G. Thomas Tanselle 'Sales of Herman Melville's Books' *Harvard Library Bulletin* 17 (1969) 195-215. The sales figures are for the U.S. and Britain combined - in Britain, Melville's earnings for *Omoo* were slightly less than for *Typee* at £203,17,9/£ 239,2,2.

4 See Louis Bougainville, *A Voyage Around the World*, a 1722 translation of which Melville borrowed in 1848 (Merton M. Sealts, *A Record of Melville's Reading*. Madison, 1966, p.43). This quotation comes from Robert Langdon *Tahiti: Island of Love* (Sydney, 1968), p.21, which is the general source for details in this section.

5 The comparison between the fate of the Tahitians in *Omoo* and that of the American-Indians is a continuation of the previous comparison in *Typee*. Alcohol - 'fire-water' - was one of the principal agents in debilitating the tribespeople of the American continent.

6 S.E. Kemper, 'Omoo: Germinal Melville' *Studies in the Novel* 10 (Winter 1978), 420-430 (p.421).



- 7 John S. Sleeper, *Tales of the Ocean, and Essays for the Forecastle, containing matters and incidents humorous, pathetic, romantic, and sentimental* (Boston, 1842), p.153, p.89.
- 8 John S. Sleeper (1794-1878), was a Massachusetts mariner, who became also a journalist and an author.
- 9 Frank Kermode writes: '[Chess] was an essentially aristocratic game. Huon, when disguised as a churl, draws suspicion upon himself by alluding to his ability to play chess.' in William Shakespeare *The Tempest* edited by Frank Kermode (London, 1988), p.123.
- 10 Quoted Langdon, p.136. William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches* (London, 1829), p.15.
- 11 Rogin (1983), p.80.
- 12 See Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (London, 1983), 'The Other Civil War', pp.220-46.
- 13 Michael Russell, *Polynesia: A History of the South Sea Islands* (London, 1849), p.18.
- 14 Frederick William Beechey, *Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific and Beering's Strait* [sic] (London, 1828), p.284.
- 15 Otto von Kotzebue, *A New Voyage Round the World in the years 1823, 1824, 1825, and 1826* (London, 1830), p.235.
- 16 Daniel Wheeler, *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labours of the late Daniel Wheeler* (London, 1842), pp. 406-7.
- 17 See Langdon, p.151.
- 18 See W.Patrick Strauss, *Americans in Polynesia 1783-1842* (East Lansing Mich., 1963), throughout.
- 19 Melville: *The Critical Heritage*, edited by Watson G.Branch (London, 1974), pp.12-13.

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#### Notes: *Mardi*

- 1 James Jubak, 'The influence of the travel narrative on Melville's *Mardi*' *Genre* 9 (1976), 121-133 (p.133).
- 2 Merrill R.Davis, *Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage* (New Haven, 1952).
- 3 *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* July 1849, in Melville: *The Critical Heritage* edited by Watson G.Branch (London, 1974).
- 4 See Mary Ellmann, *Thinking About Women* (London, 1979). Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land* (Chapel Hill, 1975), p.4, quoted in James Duban, *Melville's Major Fiction: Politics, Theology, and Imagination* (Dekalb, 1983).
- 5 The narrator is consistently solicitous, so I shall give only a few examples: 'And here it may be mentioned' (M 938); 'trust me' (M 700); 'believe me' (M 702).
- 6 Other examples of the narrator's elitism can be found throughout his narrative, but consider especially his attitudes to Samoa: 'nothing can exceed the cupidity of the Polynesian' (M 734); also (M 737), (M 738), and his constant possessives, such as 'my Samoa' (M 759). There is also his travel-convention use: 'one object of interest ... according to legend ... a wonderful recital' (M 938).
- 7 See James Duban, cited above, note 4, chapter 1.
- 8 Merrill R.Davis, *Melville's Mardi: A Chartless Voyage* (New Haven, 1952), chapters 4 and 7.



9 Larry J.Reynolds, *European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1989).

10 Donald S.Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America: A Study of Sectionalism and Foreign Policy 1848-1852* (Columbia, 1977).

11 Daniel Webster, *Writings and Speeches* (Boston, 1903), Vol.X p.586.

12 It is, of course, difficult to distinguish between these two, as Emerson characteristically delivered his thought in lecture-form, and then frequently revised what he said for later occasions. Yet this only means that he was careful to articulate and express his beliefs; the lecture was a vehicle for 'philosophy' more clearly than any novel. A study of *Nature* (1836), *Self-Reliance* (1841) or *The Poet* (1844) offers an introduction in distilled form to Emerson's social and intellectual position. A good introduction to Emerson's philosophy, made more interesting because it is set in the context of his relationship with another significant nineteenth-century figure is: Kenneth M.Harris, *Carlyle and Emerson: Their Long Debate*. (Cambridge Mass., 1978).

13 See Leonard W.Levy, *The Law of the Commonwealth and Chief Justice Shaw* (New York, 1967), for a demonstration of the prestige of the legislature in the mid-nineteenth-century U.S. The uniqueness of the U.S. polity was that it supposedly kept legislative, judicial, and executive functions apart. This assumption may be questioned due to the fact that people from the same class tended to occupy senior positions in each sphere. Nevertheless, the law was seen as one of the three pillars of the state; its judges were the state's 'guardians'. It is thus interesting that on his retirement from the bench in 1860, Shaw was pressurised by the arch-conservative 'Bell-Everetts' to stand as Elector-at-Large. Perhaps because he had spent so long as a judge, he was still reluctant to leave the 'impartiality' of the bench for party politics, and resisted the pressure, though agreeing with the group's strong Unionist views. He did, however, head a prominent group of conciliationists in the last months before war broke out.

14 I am here proposing Immanuel Kant as the central figure in nineteenth-century philosophy, even though he died in 1804. This is because, with David Hume (1711-76), he overturned notions of empiricism, by arguing that what we experience is conformed to what we know, and not vice-versa. This has radical implications, especially for religions, like Christianity, which depend heavily on revelation for their authority. Much of the nineteenth-century's so-called scepticism stems from Kant, as does its Hegelianism, which was the century's most successful early attempt to accommodate his thought (Georg Hegel, 1770-1831). Hence, the predicament of the King of Juam is, in one sense, an illustration of Kantian philosophy; as is also much of the travellers' general discussion about religion.

15 American Nativism was kindled in response to the increasing tide of emigrants from Ireland and Germany during the 1840s. It was anti-Catholic largely because the Irish were mainly Roman Catholics, as were many of the Germans; in contrast, the U.S.A. was seen as a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant state. When organised politically as Know-Nothings, the Nativists did well in state and city elections in 1854. It is perhaps less fair to accuse Transcendentalists and Unitarians of prejudice, but it should be recognised that their emphasis on simplicity and experience jarred greatly with the credal formulas of the established churches, such as the Roman Catholic (or, of course, the Presbyterian). The Papacy, as self-appointed 'keeper of the keys of faith' was, therefore, an easy target for Liberal theological satire.



16 This 'speaking for' the female by the male, is at the centre of women's oppression in literature, and is one of the tendencies that a work such as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton N.J., 1977), is attempting to counter. Although she concentrates on British novelists, Showalter explains how women have been silenced by the male pen, either by being excluded from publication, or by being forced to submit to conventions of writing that are established and enforced by the male dominated literary establishment. This perception also informs Nina Baym's *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers* (Ithaca, 1984).

17 As an example of the tendency to attribute elevated status to the narrator's maddened rhetoric, consider this passage from Ronald Mason's *The Spirit Above the Dust: A Study of Herman Melville* (London, 1951), pp.62-63:

Melville, like Taji, is alone with the elemental symbol; the voyage become a desperate flight, the epic become a tragedy, the passion thwarted by death and loss, the pleadings of his few friends irrelevant and unheard. The pervasive sea, always in Melville a character of potency, sounds in every symbol of the magnificent ending.

Here, author and narrator are typically merged, and Taji is made into a tragic hero. It is important to become wary of such rhetoric in *Mardi*; the satire of the narrator who uses it will be fully developed in *Moby-Dick*. It will there be argued that this is Melville's comment on Transcendentalist self-valuation, as it is signified in language.

18 See *The Bully Pulpit: Quotations from America's Presidents*, edited by E.Frost (New York, 1988), p.37.

19 David M.Potter, *The Impending Crisis 1848-1861*, completed and edited by Don E.Fehrenbacher (New York, 1976).

20 All quotations come either from *Melville: The Critical Heritage* (see above note 3), or Hugh W.Hetherington, *Melville's Reviewers: British and American 1846-1891* (Chapel Hill, 1961).

21 As I argued in the Introduction, both the market, and the structures that controlled the market for literature in the mid-nineteenth-century, were trans-Atlantic in extent. See James J.Barnes, *Authors, Publishers and Politicians* (London, 1974), for a demonstration of this point.

22 Janet Giltrow 'Speaking Out: Travel and Structure in Herman Melville's Early Narratives' *American Literature* 52 (March 1980), 18-32.

23 As an example of such disagreement between two practitioners of a similar approach, Reynolds says that: 'in *Mardi* Melville dealt with the June Days by using a mysterious scroll to express a number of Burkean reflections' (Reynolds, p.49). Davis, however, suggests that the scroll was read by Martin Van Buren, at a Free Soil Convention (Davis, p.90). One therefore deems it a clear response to the European Revolutions, the other, to internal U.S. politics.

24 H.Beaver in A.R.Lee ed. *Herman Melville: Reassessments*. (London, 1984), p.33.



## Notes: Redburn

- 1 William H. Gilman, *Melville's Early Life and Redburn* (New York, 1951).
- 2 It is interesting to note that in all the criticism of Redburn, I have not seen the railway trip mentioned. This may be because it is not emphasised in the narrative. While an elitist narrator might have been expected to have celebrated this capitalist achievement (as Hawthorne does in *The House of Seven Gables*), railway machinery and construction so typifies the less glamorous side of industrialisation that it would have presented another significant subject for the narrator to have neutralised. Dickens fully exploits the various connotations of the railways in *Dombey and Son* (1848).
- 3 See Philip A. M. Taylor, *The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to the United States of America* (London, 1971).
- 4 In addition to Taylor, the historical sources for this section are Hugh Brogan, *The Pelican History of the U.S.A.* (Harmondsworth, 1985) and Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution; The Age of Capital* (London, 1973, 1977).
- 5 The words of a Henry James essay come to mind here, for it seems that Redburn is responding precisely to James' call for American literature to cast as its hero the 'man of business', and is himself wishing to play that role:

I cannot but think that the American novel has in a special, far-reaching direction to sail much closer to the wind. "Business" plays a part in the United States that other interests dispute much less showily than they sometimes dispute it in the life of European countries; in consequence of which the typical American figure is above all that "business man" whom the novelist and the dramatist have scarce yet seriously touched, whose song has still to be sung and his picture still to be painted. He is often an obscure, but not less often an epic, hero, seamed all over with the wounds of the market and the dangers of the field ...

H. James, 'The Question of the Opportunities' March 26, 1898 in *Literary Criticism* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 655.

- 6 See Hobsbawm (1977) pp 71, 49.

- 7 As a contrast to Redburn's presentation of the family in the cellar, see this description:

You went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived. It was very dark inside. The window-panes were many of them broken and stuffed with rags, which was reason enough for the dusky light that pervaded the place even at mid-day. After the account I have given of the state of the street, no one can be surprised that on going into the cellar inhabited by Davenport, the smell was so foetid as almost to knock the two men down. Quickly recovering themselves, as those inured to such things do, they began to penetrate the thick darkness of the place, and to see three or four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet, brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up; the fireplace was empty and black; the wife sat on her husband's chair, and cried in the dank loneliness.

'See, missis, I'm back again, - Hold your noise, children, and don't mither your mammy for bread, here's a chap as has got some for you.'

E. Gaskell *Mary Barton* ed S. Gill, (first publ. 1848, Harmondsworth, 1970).

There is a directness in the writing - as also in the men's reactions -



which contrasts strongly with Redburn. *Mary Barton* was written to publicise the fate of the Manchester poor during the 1830s and 40s, and to explain their involvement with Chartism; a subject to which Redburn also turns - see below. Gill stresses that much of the horror of this description is due to the fact that cellars were standard habitations (in 1840 there were 2040 cellar-dwellings, occupied by 9,179 people, 3,479 of which were children). It is not the abnormal occurrence which Redburn seems to think it is.

8 London *Literary Gazette* 20 Oct 1849; W.E.Sedgwick, *Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind* (Cambridge Mass., 1945), p.45; and see also J.E.Miller, *Redburn and White-Jacket 'Initiation and Baptism'*, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 13 (1959), and Michael Davitt Bell, 'Melville's Redburn: Initiation and Authority' *New England Quarterly* 46 (1973).

9 See Merlin Bowen, 'Redburn and the Angle of Vision' *Modern Philology* 52 (1954).

10 Lawrence Thompson, *Melville's Quarrel With God* (Princeton, 1952), p.78.

11 F.D.Marryat, *Peter Simple* (London, 1837) - edition used, undated, p.16.

12 *Spectator* 27 Oct. 1849. Another such review ran: 'Mr.Melville must surely have had Peter Simple in his head, when describing "Buttons" at his first deck-washing' (*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* Nov.1849). Modern critics have perpetuated the trend, with for example Leon Howard speaking of Redburn's 'youthful naïveté' (Leon Howard, *Herman Melville: A Biography* Berkeley, 1951, p.135).

13 Thomas Philbrick, *James Fenimore Cooper and the development of American Sea Fiction* (Cambridge Mass., 1961). This quotation comes from Philbrick's Introduction to the Penguin edition of *Two Years Before the Mast* (Harmondsworth, 1981), p.23.

14 Philbrick records this detail (1981, p.14).

15 Many reviews remarked on the apparent similarities between *Two Years* and *Redburn*. See, for instance the *London Daily News*: 'this is another "voice from the forecandle". Pleasant as *Two Years before the Mast* in its earnestness of purpose ... ' (29 Oct. 1849).

16 See Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London, 1980), especially ch.4. Belsey's book is an excellent introduction into some of the narrative techniques that characterise nineteenth-century fiction, especially into the processes by which texts tended to 'hide' unpleasant social details, even when they claimed to be 'realist'.

17 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The English Notebooks*, edited by Randall Stewart (New York, 1941), p.28. Christopher Mulvey, *Anglo-American Landscapes: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Travel Literature* (Cambridge, 1983) is the best introduction to the travel genre as it related to visits either to Britain or the U.S.A. In describing its generic form, Mulvey stresses that a visit to Chester marked the start of 'real England': 'The Mersey and the Liverpool of the Adelphi Hotel were an edge of the new world - they did not add to the zero sum of the Atlantic. Valuable, accountable experience began with Chester' (Mulvey, p.43). He also indicates the pivotal role of Westminster Abbey (which he calls, 'the great Valhalla by the Thames') for the typical American traveller:

In the Abbey, the Past was given a context; it was given rhyme, and with rhyme, reason. The traveller had only to step back and look above him to be raised up from the oppressing or provoking burden of the ages. The Abbey harmonised, crystallised, spiritualised the Past; it provided the frame in



which the traveller could learn the habit of aesthetic appreciation, Mulvey, p.106

18 A parallel with *Omoo* is useful here; the 'comedy' and 'humour' of the tourist episodes in Part Two of that novel were designed with a similar deceitful intent.

19 *Redburn* edited by Harold Beaver (Harmondsworth, 1976). It is surprising just how many critics are similarly swayed. One of the most penetrating of all about the novel's political stance, when commenting on another of Redburn's rhetorical flourishes, says the narrator: 'generously allows Redburn his flurry of patriotic fervor'. This is again to mistake the real extent of the novel's manipulation of language and representation. (see H.T.McCarthy 'Melville's *Redburn* and the City', *Midwest Quarterly* 12 (1971), p.398).

20 There are many further examples in the 'Reminiscences', and some will be given below, but consider, for instance, this one:

I am filled with a comical sadness at the vanity of all human exaltation. For the cope-stone of to-day is the corner-stone of tomorrow; and as St.Peter's church was built in great part of the ruins of old Rome, so in all our erections, however imposing, we but form quarries and supply ignoble materials for the grander domes of posterity, (R 163)

In the context of Liverpool, this is surely far too sanguine a stance.

21 See Philbrick (1981, p.18), who quotes the review of *Two Years* in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, which felt that the book was a "'Yankee expedient" to enlarge its author's legal practice among seamen'. As J.D.Hart records, it is no longer tenable to suggest a close relationship between Melville and Dana; whatever the similarities between their works, the men were at best respectful to each other. See James D.Hart, 'Melville and Dana' *American Literature* 9 (1937).

22 Richard Henry Dana 'Twenty-four Years After' in *Two Years Before the Mast* (first published 1840, Harmondsworth, 1948), p.358.

23 Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book* (1819) was the earliest of these literary American tourist tracts, and its central moment is a visit to the Abbey.

24 C.L.R.James, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (New York, 1953 edition used London, 1985), p.83.

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#### Notes: *White-Jacket*

1 Patricia Allen, 'White-Jacket: Melville and the Man-of-War Microcosm', *American Quarterly* 25 (March 1973), 32-47.

2 J.L.O'Sullivan in Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York, 1963), p.32.

3 Daniel Webster, 'The Compromise Measures' 1850, in *The Writings and Speeches of D.Webster* vol.10 (Boston, 1903), p.169.

4 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (first published 1852, Harmondsworth, 1981) p.629.

5 Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the U.S.A.* (London, 1980), p.182.

6 From an editorial in the *Mechanics' Free Press*, Philadelphia, 12 June 1830, quoted in *We the Other People*, edited by Philip S.Foner (Urbana, 1976), p.7.



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- 7 Charles R. Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas* (New York, 1939) p.420; Herman Melville, *White-Jacket* edited by Alfred Kazin (New York, 1979) p.xii.
- 8 See *In Peace and War: Interpretations of American Naval History 1775-1978*, edited by Kenneth J. Hagan (Westport, 1978), p.88.
- 9 See Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (Berkeley 1979) p.90
- 10 C.S. Smith, 'An Uncertain Passage: The Bureaus Run the Navy, 1842-1861' in Hagan (above note 8). George Bancroft, the Secretary of the Navy, was the same Bancroft as the historian to whom I referred in the Introduction. As was demonstrated then, he was one of the most ardent of Democratic campaigners, and was thoroughly elitist in outlook. The fact that a member of the literary establishment could also hold such a prominent government position shows the cohesiveness of the social elite, and reinforces my emphasis that the literature was only one part of a whole system of class control.
- 11 See Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion* (New York, 1960), p.6. Meyers explores Jackson's rhetoric, and highlights the recurrent claims of 'aristocracy' which he made against his opponents, thereby securing himself power as the 'true American': 'That is just the point for Jackson: there are the whole people and the alien aristocracy, and the political advantages which result from the use of this distinction further confirm its validity' (Meyers, p.15).
- 12 Good introductions to the sea-story genre are: Edward C. Ross, *The Development of the English Sea Novel from Defoe to Conrad* (unpublished dissertation, Ann Arbor, 1924); Thomas Philbrick, *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* (Cambridge Mass., 1961). A disappointing recent example is Gordon Milne, *Ports of Call: A Study of the American Nautical Novel* (Lanham Maryland, 1986).
- 13 Tobias Smollett, *Roderick Random* (1748 edition used London 1973) edited by H.W. Hodges p.161
- 14 William Leggett, 'Brought to the Gangway' in *Naval Stories* (New York 1835), pp.171-2.
- 15 William Leggett, *Political Writings*, edited by T. Sedgwick, quoted in Meyers, p.153.
- 16 Nathaniel Ames, *Mariner's Sketches* (Providence R.I. 1830), p.113.
- 17 Any critic must be immensely grateful to Howard P. Vincent, whose book *The Tailoring of Melville's White-Jacket* (Evanston, 1970), was the first comprehensive study of the sources from which the text of the novel was constructed. Nevertheless, having broken down the book this far, Vincent then refuses to face the consequences of his analysis, and refute the legacy of previous 'biographical' commentators. These quotations come from Vincent, pp.228, 229.
- 18 Samuel Leech, *Thirty Years From Home* (Boston 1843), p.88.
- 19 Of course, *White-Jacket* himself also used Dana!, see (W-J 87, 424).
- 20 The quotations in this paragraph come from Vincent, pp. 10, 233, 19, and 233, in order.
- 21 Before Vincent, the critic who tended to promote *White-Jacket's* loss of his garment as his 'fall into life' was F.O. Matthiessen. See his *American Renaissance* (New York, 1941), pp.340-5.
- 22 James Fenimore Cooper, *The History of the Navy of the United States of America* (London, 1839), pp.xxiv-v.
- 23 See *Letters* 65, referred to in *Redburn*, above.
- 24 Charles Dibdin 'Tom Bowling' in *Sea Songs and Ballads* (edition used



London 1863) - Dibdin's work was very popular, and virtually created the stereotype the 'handsome sailor', which was later to be exploited again by Melville in *Billy Budd* (1924).

25 One other nineteenth-century figure objected to Chase (as to some further aspects of the narration). Rear-Admiral Thomas O.Selfridge wrote:

This character is too overdrawn for a reality, - The slang uttered by Jack Chase to Tubbs the whaler savours of anything but the gentleman, a title which the author is of the opinion could be deservedly applied to his friend.

('A Reply to Herman Melville's *White-Jacket*' by Rear-Admiral Thomas O.Selfridge Sr., edited by Charles R.Anderson *American Literature* 7 (1935) - but there was no interrogation of the nature of *White-Jacket's narrative*, which was what Melville was hoping to inspire.

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### Notes: *Moby-Dick*

1 See L.Howard *Herman Melville: A Biography*. (Berkeley, 1951), Ch. 7.

2 'General Note'

So many books and articles have been produced on *Moby-Dick* that it is impossible to refer to them all, but I shall offer a few comments on some well-known contributions, largely to situate my own reading.

Most British readers are likely to read the novel in a popular paperback edition, so it seems sensible to consider what kind of formative influence their Introductions will have. The Oxford Classics version, edited by Tony Tanner (Oxford, 1988), conceives of *Moby-Dick* as an 'American epic' (which has been a standard approach). It applauds the 'open, susceptible, flexible, impressionable, sympathetic, Ishmael' (p.xviii), and also comments on the 'bookishness' of the final text. Harold Beaver's Introduction and vast critical apparatus to the Penguin edition (Harmondsworth, 1972), is a tour-de-force in its own right. Beaver's essay is provocative and fun to read, but ultimately depressing, becoming preoccupied with the assertion that Melville apparently eschewed order and engagement for display and drama. Beaver's position is aptly summarised in his later essay for *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* (Vol 9 edited by Boris Ford, Harmondsworth, 1988), in which he says:

We prefer to read his texts, in Roland Barthes phrase, as onions, 'whose body contains finally no heart, no kernel, no secret, no irreducible principle, nothing except the infinity of their own envelopes - which envelop nothing other than the unity of their own surfaces', p.129

This, possibly the most widely read handbook to the American literary scene, thus establishes the orthodoxy that Melville was little more than a post-structuralist before his time.

Some other more 'scholarly' considerations maintain this interest in the novel as a cultural playground which apparently shows that Melville's main interest in writing it was to explore the 'nature of reality'. A good example of this type is W.B.Dillingham's *Melville's Later Novels*. (Athens Georgia, 1986), which focusses on the author's possible Gnostic interest. Edgar Dryden's *Melville's Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth*. (Baltimore, 1968), is a more valuable work, because it sees the



novel as Ishmael's 'creative exploration' of his past. This accurately stresses the role of the narrator as an entity distinct from the author, but is unfortunately unfixed in any political or social perspective:

His identity, like his world, is a purely verbal one; he exists only as the teller of a story - a story which has as its aim the portrayal of the world as it exists beneath man's fictive creations. But how is this to be done when, apparently, what remains after man's veil of forms is lifted is indescribable facelessness and silence? p.100

Ishmael is the teller of a story; but he tells it according to his class allegiances.

Yet a number of recent critics have begun to challenge not only the latest post-structuralist dominance of the American literary scene, but also the residual influence of the liberal theorists before them. Although none can match the sheer sweep of C.L.R. James, whose *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways* (first published 1953, London, 1985), offers a unique insight into the book as a political text, this development is very welcome.

James Duban's *Melville's Major Fiction: Politics, Theology, and Imagination* (Dekalb, 1983), is interesting, because it offers an ingenious reworking of Sacvan Bercovitch's theory about the dominance of the 'jeremiad' in American thought. Rather than seeing *Moby-Dick* as another example of this purgative rhetorical performance (with the sinking of the Pequod being a rhetorical 'cleansing' of the system), and with Ishmael as the voice calling to reform, it argues that Ishmael is a racist paternalist, and that the jeremiad was frequently used to justify expansionism. This marks the beginning of an assault on Ishmael's position to which I also subscribe.

Similarly critical of Ishmael, and just as important as Duban's book is Donald Pease's *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* (Madison, 1987). Like Duban, Pease reworks a previously important critical text, though this time to expose some of its hidden motivations. Pease argues that the dominance of F.O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* (New York, 1941), has imposed a false canon on American studies, and has also leant to the mis-understanding of Melville's work. He focusses on the concept of the 'American hero' which he feels Matthiessen creates from Melville and his narrator, and reveals instead that *Moby-Dick* is the location for 'cultural persuasion' by Ishmael. In this light, the narrator is seen to manipulate characters such as Ahab in his own efforts to portray himself as the locus of positive values. Moreover, Pease recognises that Ishmael generates these 'values' at a time of crisis (slavery and the Compromise) and also that Matthiessen generated his parallel ones at an equal time of crisis (during the Second World War); a salutary comment on the power of language and very apt in the context of *Moby-Dick*. However, Pease perhaps becomes preoccupied by the Melville/Matthiessen nexus, so overlooking many of the novel's features. In addition to these two highlights, there have been many other contributions to this new awakening: both Michael Rogin *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (Berkeley, 1979), and Robert Clark *History, Ideology, and Myth in American Fiction 1823-52* (Basingstoke, 1984), for instance, comment pertinently on the rhetoric of the novel, and its relationship with nineteenth-century people and events.

This chapter stresses three areas, however, which have not yet received sufficient coverage: First, *Moby-Dick* utilises broadly the same textual structure as its predecessors (many of the political critics are so



interested in 'ideology' that they fail to question how that ideology is actually expressed); secondly, the novel, in continuing the analysis of Melville's earlier works, also continues their interest in the politics of representation, which Melville clearly felt to be crucial; thirdly, there is still a residual tendency to 'excuse' Ishmael, and to 'understand' his attitudes in the context of the world in which he is deemed to be writing - this needs to be challenged.

3 See *The Letters of Herman Melville*, edited by Merrill R. Davis and William H. Gilman No. 94, pp. 144-5.

4 The quotations come from David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis 1848-1861*. (New York, 1976), pp. 120, 391.

5 These details come from John R. Bockstoe, *Whales, Ice, and Men: The History of Whaling in the Western Arctic* (Seattle, 1986), which is also the best modern history of Pacific whaling in general, and which has an excellent bibliography. Bockstoe emphasises very well not just the economic features of the industry, but its political ones too, for instance considering its relationship with the Civil War.

6 Alan Heimert, 'Moby-Dick and American political symbolism' *American Quarterly* 15, (1963) 498-534; Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York, 1964). Heimert establishes Melville's interest in political events, and his preoccupation with the rhetoric used by politicians and commentators as they wrangled for power. He illustrates the way that contemporaries would have understood the image of the 'ship of state', which he says was popular with the politicians formulating the Compromise. Marx furthers Heimert's suggestion that the *Pequod* symbolises American society because of its function as a whaling ship, and offers an excellent analysis of the novel's many mechanical images. He is more certain than Heimert of Melville's intent in *Moby-Dick* to judge his country, yet comments: 'Melville acknowledges the political ineffectuality of this symbol-maker's truth' (p. 318). In explaining the novel's symbolism, Marx overlooks its consistent interest in language, the level at which *Moby-Dick* is most potent.

7 Marx is typical of many critics who promote the view that the novel's virtue resides in Ishmael. He suggests that by avoiding either extreme during his education on the *Pequod*, Ishmael gains 'wisdom' (p. 319). This naive assertion again falsely conflates Melville with one of his narrators, Ishmael.

8 'Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs' in Herman Melville, *Pierre, Israel Potter, The Piazza Tales, The Confidence-Man, Uncollected Prose, Billy Budd*. (Cambridge, 1984), p. 1228. The question of Melville's understanding and use of Emerson is extremely large, and has preoccupied commentators in many different ways. A good introduction is Merton M. Sealts, 'Melville and Emerson's Rainbow' in his *Pursuing Melville 1940-1980* (Madison, 1982). Sealts claims that Melville held Emerson in high esteem, and proposes Bulkington as an Emersonian hero. I am sceptical of Melville's approbation. *White-Jacket* and *Mardi* satirise Transcendentalist mast-head dreamers, as does *Moby-Dick* in the chapter entitled 'The Mast-Head'. Moreover, the comments in Melville's letters are surely playful in the extreme:

I had heard him as full of transcendentalisms, myths & oracular gibberish. I had only glanced at a book of his once in Putnam's store - that was all I knew of him, till I heard him lecture. - To my surprise, I found him quite intelligible, tho' to say the truth, they told me that that night he was unusually plain, (*Letters*, 3 March 1849)



See Emerson's own essay 'Self-Reliance' (1841) in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selected Essays* edited by Larzer Ziff (Harmondsworth, 1982).

9 See Carl Bode, *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture 1840-61* (Berkeley, 1959). Bode has a chapter on 'Art', in which he sets out the aims of the American Art Union. He shows how the reproduction of prints and paintings fed the desire to adorn the parlour as a place of cultured show in which 'the beautiful would be conducive to the good', p.83.

10 W.Alexander, leader of the first mission to the Marquesas Islands, quoted in T.Walter Herbert, *Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilization* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), p.64.

11 Francis A.Olmsted, *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage* (New York, 1841), pp.248-9, iv, 12 and 298.

12 The Revd. Henry T.Cheever, *The Whaleman's Adventures in the Southern Ocean*, ed. W.Scoresby (London, 1850), p.30.

13 John Ross Browne, *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* (New York, 1846 edition used 1850), p.419, p.117.

14 Frederick Debell Bennett, *Narrative of a Whaling Voyage Round the Globe, from the year 1833 to 1836* (London, 1840), p.313.

15 Thomas Beale, *The Natural History of the Sperm Whale* (London, 1839), p.221.

16 Howard P.Vincent, *The Trying Out of Moby-Dick* (Boston, 1949) is the most comprehensive analysis of Ishmael's source texts. As with his *Tailoring of Melville's White-Jacket*. (Evanston, 1970), Vincent's is an indispensable work; but having identified the sources, he does not scrutinise them to reveal why they might have been used.

17 Duban, p.136.

18 Pease, 'Ishmael recalls nothing if not the pure persuasion at work in Emerson's rhetoric', p.271.

19 David E.Hirsch, 'The Dilemma of the Liberal Intellectual: Melville's Ishmael' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 5 (Summer 1963), 169-188: 'In him are joined the two currents of the American consciousness - the rational liberalism of the Enlightenment so nobly embodied in Jefferson and Franklin, and the irrational foreboding darkness of Puritanism observable in the Mathers and Edwardses' p.181.

20 A.Robert Lee 'Moby-Dick: The Tale and the Telling' in *New Perspectives on Herman Melville* edited by Faith Pullin (Edinburgh, 1979), 86-127, (p.112).

21 Heimert, 'The abortive mutiny of ten crewmen out of thirty, the early defection of seven of Steelkilt's associates, the ultimate capitulation of the others and the successful commandeering of another ship, follow closely the sequence of historical events from 1844, through the state-by-state bolts from the Party, to the Utica Convention of 1848 and the formation of the Free-Soil Party at Buffalo', p.529.

22 T.Walter Herbert also explores the religious issues raised by Ishmael in his essay 'Calvinist Earthquake: *Moby-Dick* and Religious Tradition' in *New Essays on Moby-Dick* edited by Richard H.Brodhead (Cambridge, 1986) 109-140.

23 See Benito Cereno, the later stages of the story, especially the Depositions to the Spanish Notary in Lima. These complicate the puzzle that is the text. Who is 'guilty': the rebellious slaves; the ineffectual captain; or the American sealer Delano? Even in forcing the reader to face this question, Lima becomes a place in which the typical claims of Delano to 'right action' are undercut. Although Babo the slave leader is executed, he has revealed Delano's infelicitous assumptions. Paradoxically, the



Spanish legal system in Lima is more willing to confront the realities of slavery than the American.

24 See Lawrence W. Levine, 'William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation' *American Historical Review*. 89 (Feb. 1984), 34-66: 'Not until the nineteenth century, however, did Shakespeare come into his own - presented and recognized almost everywhere in the country ... One student of the American stage concluded that in cities on the Eastern Seaboard at least one-fifth of all plays offered in a season were likely to be by Shakespeare. George Makepeace Towle, an American consul in England, returned to his own country just after the Civil War and remarked with some surprise, "Shakespearian dramas are more frequently played in and more popular in America than in England"', p.37. See also F.O. Matthiessen and Charles Olsen, *Call Me Ishmael* (London, 1967).

25 From 'The Two Yokes' (London, 1852), p.15.

26 Lee, p.112.

27

In this light, it is interesting to compare *Moby-Dick* with other whaling narratives, to see the extent of Ishmael's presentation. One of the prime sources for the book was Owen Chase's *Narrative of the most extraordinary and distressing shipwreck of the whale-ship Essex* (1821). Like Ishmael, Chase writes to publicise the whaling industry (and to recover his losses in the sinking of the ship): 'more real chivalry is not often displayed on the deck of a battle-ship' (Chase, ed B.R. McElderry, New York, 1963, p.6). However, most of his narrative is a record of the privations endured after the sinking, and concentrates especially on the survivors' cannibalism; the actual sinking is calmly rendered:

I observed a very large spermaceti whale, as well as I could judge about eighty-five feet in length; he broke water about twenty rods off our weather-bow, and was lying quietly, with his head in a direction for the ship. He spouted two or three times, and then disappeared. In less than two or three seconds he came up again, about the length of the ship off, and made directly for us, at the rate of about two or three knots. The ship was then going with about the same velocity. His appearance and attitude gave us at first no alarm; but while I stood watching his movements, and observing him but a ship's length off, coming down for us with great celerity, I involuntarily ordered the boy at the helm to put it hard up; intending to sheer off and avoid him. The words were scarcely out of my mouth, before he came down upon us with full speed, and struck the ship with his head, just forward of the fore-chains ... We looked at each other with perfect amazement, deprived almost of the power of speech. Many minutes elapsed before we were able to realise the dreadful accident; during which time he passed under the ship, grazing her keel as he went along, came up along side of her to leeward, and lay on the top of the water (apparently stunned with the violence of the blow) for the space of a minute; he then started off in a direction to leeward ... I again discovered the whale, apparently in convulsions, on the top of the water, about one hundred rods to leeward. He was enveloped in the foam of the sea, that his continual and violent thrashing about in the water had created around him, and I could distinctly see him smite his jaws together, as if distracted with rage and fury. He remained a short time in this situation, and then started off with great velocity, across the bows of the ship, to windward ... I was aroused with the cry of a man at the hatchway, 'Here he is - he is making for us again.' I turned around, and saw him about one hundred rods directly



ahead of us, coming down apparently with twice his ordinary speed, and to me at that moment, it appeared with ten-fold fury and vengeance in his aspect. (pp.19-22)

Although the whale's second attack on the boat emphasises his deliberate anger, Chase's narrative recognises that the original blow was unpremeditated. This is not some malevolent deity, but a surprised animal who retaliates in self-defence. This point is reinforced by Captain Pollard's own narrative of the same sinking:

The whale, as though hurt by a severe and unexpected concussion, shook its enormous head, and sheered off to so considerable a distance, that for some time we had lost sight of her from the starboard quarter; of which we were very glad, hoping that the worst was over. Nearly an hour afterwards we saw the same fish, - we had no doubt of this from her size, and the direction in which she came - making again towards us. We were at once aware of our danger, but escape was impossible. (Chase, p.98)

Another witness, T.Chapple, is of similar opinion:

They found she had been struck by a whale of the largest size, which rose close to the ship and then darted under her, and knocked off a great part of the false keel. The whale appeared again, and went about a quarter of a mile off, then suddenly returned and struck the ship with great force. (Chase, p.105)

Thus each man describes events differently, but none of them construe the whale as having 'motives'.

J.N.Reynolds, in another possible source for *Moby-Dick* is similarly sceptical. His narrative *Mocha Dick* (published in *Knickerbocker Magazine*, 1839), fully emphasises the fight between the whale and the pursuing whale-boats, but does not present the whale as anything other than an animal to be killed. This is also the line taken in the descriptions of the various 'fighting' whales in sources such as Thomas Beale's *Natural History of the Sperm Whale* (1839). Indeed, such authors usually stress that the whale's tail and jaws wreak havoc on the boats, and incidentally on the men in them; never on the men alone.

Thus it is only in the purely fictional narratives that the whales assume the kind of mythical aspect that Ishmael intends to project on to *Moby Dick*. Captain Barnacle's *Pehe Nu-e*, for instance, is apparently the sworn enemy of 'Uncle Joe', who having survived an encounter with him thirty years before now wants his vengeance on the 'Satan of the Sea' (p.76). In this story 'the tiger whale of the Pacific' first appears in darkness in a way that is very reminiscent of Ishmael's *Moby Dick*:

At that instant the huge form of a monster whale was seen to shoot out into the yellow moonglade, hold its black outline defined with terrible distinctness for an instant, - poised ninety feet in the glimmering air, - and fall crashing back upon the shining waters it had emerged from. (p.59)

As *Pehe Nu-e* was published in 1877 it would seem more than likely that *Moby-Dick* was a direct source (especially as the captain, like Ahab, is scarred, and has the power of 'prophecy' - p.41).

Hence it is futile to seek direct inspiration for Ishmael's presentation of the white whale in any of the sources, and is much more sensible to stress its contrivance in juxtaposition with evidence from actual whalers. This is not to say that these narratives are without 'purpose' - indeed, Ishmael copies Chase's patriotism, or the tract-like



presentation of life on the *Pequod* as a clash between an evil crew and a good hero (himself - see *Harry the Whaler*). Yet it is to argue again that Moby Dick is denied his true reality in Ishmael's hands. Whaling was certainly a dangerous occupation, and sperm whales were definitely vicious, usually damaging and sometimes destroying the ships sent to capture them; but they did not engage in feuds with particular captains, as Ishmael would have us believe.

28 See, for example, C.Porter 'How to Make Double-Talk Speak' in Brodhead ed. (1986). She suggests that Ishmael's relationship with Queequeg is an example of his 'boundary transgression' (p.81), by which she means his willingness to expose himself to the possibilities of new experiences. This, however, still concentrates on the the white man's response, and refuses to accord the Polynesian his true status and power (he remains a 'function' of Ishmael's daring). Yet the 'boundary transgression' to which she also refers - the subversion of the scientific aspirations of 'Cetology', and the legal aspirations of 'The Affidavit' by Ishmael's own hand - reinforces the view of the narrator as a figure who cannot adequately control his own story. Ishmael dissolves discourses, not because he is some kind of cultural hero, but in his attempt to place his characters. His wish to 'bury' the whale is a central feature of his narrative strategy.

29 Henry MacNeal Turner in H.Zinn *A People's History of the United States*. (London, 1980), p.196. See K.M.Stampp *The Era of Reconstruction: America after the Civil War 1865-1877*. (London, 1965), for a description of how the radical governments in the defeated South were soon replaced by ones more 'congenial' to the North.

30 This analysis is, of course, heavily indebted to Jameson's notion of the 'Political Unconscious'. It is impossible to summarise the argument of the book in this space, but a brief quotation may explain the way in which it has influenced my thought:

The whole paradox of what we have here called the subtext may be summed up in this, that the literary work or cultural object, as though for the first time, brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction. It articulates its own situation and textualizes it.

F.Jameson *The Political Unconscious; Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. (London, 1983), pp.81-2.

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### Notes: Conclusion

1 Herman Melville, *Pierre*, Israel Potter, *The Confidence-Man*, *Uncollected Prose*, *Billy Budd* (Cambridge, 1984) p.1277.

2 As a good example of the type, see Larry J.Reynolds, *European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance* (New Haven, 1988): 'Perhaps the strongest evidence for the point I am making (which, of course, calls into question the multitude of Marxist and New Left interpretations that dwell upon Melville's sympathies for the proletariat) occurs in the final chapter of the novel.' pp.121-2. Reynolds bases his argument on the suggestion that the *Pequod* sinks with the red flag (symbol of communism) hammered to its mast.

3 Herman Melville, *Pierre*, Israel Potter, *The Confidence-Man*, *Uncollected Prose*, *Billy Budd* (Cambridge, 1984), p.1431.



4 See the extensive Introduction in Herman Melville, *Billy Budd* edited by Milton R. Stern (Indianapolis, 1975), pp.xliii-xliv.

5 C.L.R. James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (London, 1985), pp.130-1.

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#### Notes: Illustrations - Sources

1 J. Barry, *The Phoenix or the Resurrection of Freedom* (1776). This can be found reproduced in either S. Symmons, 'James Barry's *Phoenix*: An Irishman's American Dream', *Studies in Romanticism* 15 (1976), or Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time* (New York, 1975), p.144.

2 George Washington and John Paul Jones. These are frontispieces to articles in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*: July 1855 and February 1856 respectively.

3 This is a detail from William Hodges' painting 'Tahiti Revisited', and is the cover to Herman Melville's *Typee*, edited by George Woodcock (Harmondsworth, 1972).

4 The Round-Robin, *Omoo*. See Herman Melville, *Typee, Omoo, Mardi* (Cambridge, 1982), p.403.

5 'A confrontation between sailors and citizens' is from J.S. Sleeper, *Tales of the Ocean, and Essays for the Forecastle* (Boston, 1842), p.13.

6 The real play bills are from *The Pageant of America*, edited by R.H. Gabriel, volume 14 (New York, 1950), pages 41 and 115; the false play bill is from Herman Melville, *Redburn, White-Jacket, Moby-Dick* (Cambridge, 1983), p.444.

7 The sperm whale attacking the boat is from Sleeper, p.407.

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